

SUBJECTIVITY IN FLUX:
YOUTH IN LATIN AMERICAN AND LATINO LITERATURE

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Abstract

Canonical works of Latin American and Latino/a/x fiction and film often employ young central characters that permit these works to reflect upon significant social issues. At the same time, the prevalent theoretical model used for the critical study of these novels and their young protagonists is the *Bildungsroman*, or the “novela de la formación” [novel of formation]. The engagement of this distinctly western model most often results in either the reading of Latin American and Latino/a/x narratives of youth as “failed” *Bildungsroman* or in the creation and deployment of reading strategies that permit such “failures” to be read as part of a discussion regarding regional difference.

Through a close reading of canonical narratives of youth that focuses on the characters’ distinctly liminal status, my project recognizes youth as central to a range of aesthetic projects enacted within oft-studied works of literature and film. My project focused on Rosario Castellanos’ 1962 novel *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] as well as her 1957 novel, *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians]; José María Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], published in 1958; Mario Vargas Llosa’s 1967 novella “Los cachorros”; Jorge Amado’s 1937 novel *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]; Cristina Peri Rossi’s *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children’s Rebellion], published in 1980; Junot Díaz’s 2007 novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*; Roberto Bolaño’s 1998 novel, *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives]; Cary Fukunaga’s 2009 film *Sin nombre* [Nameless]; Fernand Meirelles and Kátia Lund’s 2002 film *Cidade de Deus* [City of God]; and César Aira’s 1993 novel *Cómo me hice monja* [How I Became a Nun]. The close reading of this corpus led me to conclude that these works utilize the liminal perspectives and voices of young characters

in order to engage with the increasing fragmentation found across these distinct societies. My research further shows how institutions including the Catholic Church, the local schools, the State, and the Family, collude to delineate the possibilities within and against which youths come to define themselves. To that end, I found three principle trajectories exist for youth in these works: they may either commit to lives of social reform, recognize the failure of traditional trajectories, or occupy an immanent, as opposed to a transcendental, *telos* as a form of resistance acknowledging the lack of viable options.

Chapter One suggests a theory of liminality as based on readings in Cultural Anthropology which I join to a consideration of agency based on my reading of Michel Foucault and an idea of pluritopic hermeneutics taken from the works of Walter Mignolo. Chapter Two examines central institutions such as the Church, Schools, and the State, that create and normalize trajectories for youth. Chapter Three uses an idea of the “competent reader” along with an examination of social matrices to engage with young protagonists as active navigators of complex social networks. Chapter Four shows how the elimination of the transcendental *telos* creates communal groups that take up a semi-permanent status as liminal entities. Chapter Five functions as a literary interlude showing how questions of gender and body begin to dissolve in the liminal space of literature. Together, these chapters show how young characters function at the nexus of a complex interplay of aesthetic praxes and social restraints and how the close reading of Latin American and Latino/a/x literature works to correct an overreliance on the *Bildungsroman* as an approach to figures of youth in literature.

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Introduction

Marcela and Idolina on the Threshold:

Liminal Spaces and Adolescent Bodies in Rosario Castellanos'

***Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]**

A dimness emanates throughout Rosario Castellano's second novel, *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]. The original Spanish title refers to a Catholic rite initially observed during three days of Holy Week at which time officiants observed a rite venerating the persecution of Christ at the hands of first the Jewish officials and later Roman guards in the days leading up to his death (Bastus 77).¹ For the past seven hundred years, this ritual has been observed daily and has been referred to as the *matins* [Matins] (Cabrol "Matins"; Bastus 77).² Despite this change, at its heart the rite signifies "en sentido místico... como el Señor fué preso y atado... en el huerto de Getsemaní" [in a mystical sense how the Lord was taken prisoner and bound in the Garden of

¹ The original commemoration of the "Oficio de Tinieblas" or Office of Darkness was thusly connected to the Holy week celebrations and took place from Wednesday through Friday taking place in the days immediately preceding. Translating this title into English presented the novel's translator, Esther Allen, a challenge given the history and evolution of the rite to which it refers and which will be discussed momentarily. Beyond the traditional, religious meaning, the very word "Oficio" proves difficult to translate as it refers both to an office or a position of professional employment, perhaps best thought of in the English idea of a professional or sacred "calling." Allen avoided this challenge by renaming the English translation *The Book of Lamentations*, a choice called "stunningly apt" by the Mexican journalist, Alma Guillermoprieto in her introduction to the book as a sort of catalog of woes (Guillermoprieto v). I caution the English language reader not to accept such an approach to this difficult and highly nuanced text. While *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] certainly makes reference to difficult historical circumstances, namely the crucifixion of a young indigenous boy, the book's original title contextualizes this in the symbolic, epistemic violence that divided Chiapanecan society and that functions in the text as an aesthetic meritorious of consideration in its own right and rather than as part of a list of grievances. I suggest *Work of Darkness*, *Office of Darkness*, or *The Rites of Darkness* as more appropriate names for this novel. That being said, I have chosen to include the familiar English title along with its original Spanish translation as a point of reference for English language readers of the novel.

² In fact, the presently recognized Matins cycle in fact conflates two older ceremonies, the Vigils and the Matins, "in which the latter served as the closing part of the vigil" (Cabrol "Matins").

Gethsemane] through a combination of prayers and ritually-prescribed darkness that leaves the churches in which the rites are performed in a murky haze, between darkness and light (Bastus 77).

As the murkiness around the book's opening starts to dissipate, Castellanos' plot begins taking shape around the lives of a group of characters divided geographically and socially. In this context, her second chapter proffers a sequence of violent actions that provide the only link between two characters crucial to the novel: Marcela Gómez Oso, a young indigenous girl from the mountain village of Chamula, and Idolina Cifuentes, a young "Cáxlan" from a wealthy and established family in la Ciudad Real.³ Despite their similar ages, these two characters never meet. At the same time, they are closely bound not only by this important chapter but by their similar reactions to the experiences of perversion, violence, and abuse found so readily within this book.

The novel's second chapter opens with the image of a desperate Marcela, who "con movimientos furtivos y rápidos, como de animal avezado a la persecución y al peligro" [with, furtive rapid movements, like an animal accustomed to pursuit and danger] had just managed to flee the violent confrontation between the Chamulans and a small group of poor Ladinas as the latter faction attempted to steal the goods that Chamulans intended to peddle in la Ciudad Real (Castellanos *Oficio* 9; Castellanos *Book* 10). Seeking peace and quiet following her narrow escape, Marcela chooses to avoid the crowded and noisy central market and decides, instead, to sell her pitchers by going door to door in the "barrios apacibles" [peaceful neighborhoods] (Castellanos *Oficio* 12;

³ Castellanos prose often makes use of Spanish and Tzotzil words describing ethnicity. "Cáxlan" in the Tzotzil language refers to any Spanish speaker while "Ladino" is a Tzotzil word for an indigenous person who speaks Spanish and is seen, by other indigenous people, as assimilated to the economically and socially dominant culture.

Castellanos *Book* 10). This small but fateful decision ultimately leads to her being raped by Don Leonardo Cifuentes “una de las varas altas de Ciudad Real” [Don Leonardo Cifuentes, one of Ciudad Real’s highest and mightiest] (Castellanos *Oficio* 12; Castellanos *Book* 10, 13). The chapter’s narrative follows Marcela closely up until the moment immediately before she is violated. At this precise instant, the narrative shifts from the young, terrified girl to Doña Mercedes, a ladina woman who the reader learns makes regular work of procuring young indigenous girls for Leonardo Cifuentes, who “es un codicioso de indias” [“has a taste for Indian girls”] (Castellanos *Oficio* 12; Castellanos *Book* 13). Her reprehensible undertaking completed, Doña Mercedes closes the door on Marcela and we the reader follow her thoughts until she is perceived by Leonardo Cifuentes’ wife, Isabel Zebadúa, who “vio la india despavorida; vio la encubridora furiosa y no necesitó más para entender lo que no era la primera vez que presenciaba” [“saw the terrified Indian girl, the furious procuress [Doña Mercedes], and understood immediately [as] it wasn’t the first time she had witnessed the scene”] (Castellanos *Oficio* 14; Castellanos *Book* 15). Isabel hurriedly shuts the door and becomes the first of the novel’s characters to peer, literally, into a dark void as she opens a door and whispers with despair “Idolina.” Idolina Cifuentes resides in literal darkness for the vast majority of Castellanos’ novel. She is introduced in the final lines of this second chapter and although the short paragraph that introduces her takes pains to establish her physical rigidity, it ultimately describes how with her back turned, away at once from her mother and from us, the readers, it looks “as if she were fleeing” (Castellanos *Book* 16).

Already here at the beginning of the novel, Idolina defies her mother and the reader by turning her back on the world and its base cruelty which mere moments ago

emerged, again, in the form of Marcela's rape. Consequently, the chapter starts with a young, virginal indigenous woman making her way innocently through the world it closes on the face of another young woman who, for reasons that the novel slowly unveils, has already seen enough. Read in the context of the first chapter's physical violence, this passage continues unraveling the brutality that structures the relationship between the indigenous Chamulans and the Ladinos/Cáxlans of la Ciudad Real while also hinting at the extra vulnerability experienced by women residing in this context. The darkness that Idolina chooses to face thus already appears as the darkness that faces this society, even if they choose to ignore it, a choice that ultimately brings both groups into a bloody conflict by the novel's end.

The occupation, be it sacred or profane, that this novel takes for itself involves the elaboration of lives lived in the context of a profound and consuming murkiness. The clearest of details start to crumble under the weight of the reader's gaze as the prose directs it towards the events of the novel. This is a society that has already experienced a series of seismic shifts: the power of the indigenous groups gave way to the dominance of the Spanish empire with its military and disease, that empire also failed leaving Chiapas a rudderless state dominated by strongmen and the occasional woman, although history "ayuda a borrar su imagen, a borrar su memoria" ["helps to erase her image, to erase her memory"] (Castellanos *Oficio* 358; Castellanos *Book* 400).⁴ What remains involves these characters attempting to adapt to the flux of lives lived at a time when the essential rules of law, the Church, and even the family have shown themselves as corrupt and even complicit in the pervasive violence.

⁴ Castellanos writes this of an indigenous *ilol* or priestess remembered in the novel's final chapter and whispered to Idolina by her Nana.

If the context of Rosario Castellanos' novel is the overall sense of flux of life that pervades the spaces central to the work and at a time when traditional social structures are exposed as already in decay, then focusing on characters whose age, sex, and social situation compounds this experience of fluctuation proves both a challenging and, as I intend this dissertation to show, an enlightening task. These two young adolescents occupy traditional social spaces of dependence that for young women traditionally permitted two means of exit: as women from these traditional societies, they could either marry into adult life or they could reject social life entirely by, in Marcela's situation, accepting her exile to the rural mountains or, in Idolina's case, by entering religious life, specifically by becoming a nun.

Read closely, *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] posits its two adolescent characters, Idolina and Marcela, at the threshold between youth and adulthood. In this context, finding a discussion of bodily changes is hardly surprising as



Image I

art and literature often has, since western antiquity, focused on these external changes in the classification of youth and its separation from earlier pre-pubescent times. Artists including Picasso have gone so far as to explore the disparity between the internal experience of the corporeal and the interaction with its external appearance (see Image I, left).⁵

Considering these facts and the situation of both Idolina and Marcela on the thresholds of their own, respective, social maturities introduces a range of questions relating to their liminal situations. First, how do we as readers engage with 'liminal' figures, that is

⁵ Image I Source: Picasso, Pablo. "Girl Before a Mirror." *Pablo Picasso: Paintings, Quotes, and Biography*, www.pablocicasso.org/girl-before-mirror.jsp.

characters whose experiences are understood as transitory but significant in their own development? What expectations do these texts make of us and what tools do the texts themselves suggest for their examination? Additionally, how do social units such as the family, the Church, and the State establish normative praxes of youth and what happens when deviations occur? Do societies and particularly these institutions ever permit for individual deviation or flexibility? What happens when categories and trajectories fail? Is collusion possible for youth characters or do the independent experiences, such as those of Idolina and Marcela, dominate? How does individual identity shift to accommodate or to respond to social norms?

Project Overview

This dissertation engages with the previous questions among others by considering the works of Latin American, Latino/a/x, and diasporic writers and filmmakers who employ young characters – primarily children and adolescents but also occasionally toddlers and young adults – in order to reflect upon questions and challenges of liminality.⁶ To that end, the traditional approach to the serious critical study of texts concerning young people involves either reading them as *Bildungsromane*, or the “novelas de la formación” [novels of formation], a popular western literary tradition of novels in which a protagonist develops a world view or as “adolescent” or “young adult” literature, that is as texts intended for adolescent audiences, a reading that gains popularity as many of these texts are taught in “colegios” [high schools].⁷ Both approaches fail to accurately

⁶ In approaching these distinct and at times complexly related literary corpuses together, I do not wish to assume nor do I wish create a scenario in which such texts would be read as coextensive. Rather, I approach these works as extant within non-coextensive traditions that may be examined, most often, as points of contrast particularly in the distinct languages and matrices considered.

⁷ Field research conducted in Brazil, Peru, and Mexico has permitted me the opportunity to study several of these texts and films in the countries that produced them. While far from scientific, discussions with

describe or to predict how the central texts considered by this project function and, as a result, our knowledge of Latin American, Latino/a/x, and diasporic literature remains problematically incomplete and to the point of being deeply flawed.⁸

The other challenge of reading these texts as *Bildungsromane* or “novelas de formación” [novels of formation/Bildungsroman] proves a more complicated and more necessary challenge. It is undeniable that the *Bildungsroman* form shaped the way narratives of youth are studied in pursuit of scholarly knowledge. Franco Moretti’s important book *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture* goes so far as to argue that classical *Bildungsroman* peddled images of totalized life in order to demonstrate a person’s ability to synthesize the individual alongside the social in order to provide the prevalent, capitalistic Western model of individuality the appearance of being “*symbolically legitimate*” (Moretti 16). In fact, the impact of this form on literature and literary studies is so profound that, Moretti writes “even those novels that clearly are *not Bildungsroman* or novels of formation” but which treat subjects such as youth, the development of a personality or ‘coming of age’ remain “perceived by us against this conceptual horizon; so we speak of a ‘failed initiation’ or of a ‘problematic formation’” (Moretti 15). It is important to note that Moretti actually describes a flaw that already

literary scholars and lay people revealed that many of these texts are taught regularly in high school curriculums.

⁸ To dispel with the simpler question, reading these texts as “young adult” or “adolescent” literature creates a genre through the practice of transmitting literature and through classrooms and even more so through its inclusion in standardized curriculum. Consequently, while young people may very well read these texts and may also prove occasionally capable of performing compelling readings of these texts based on their shared liminal status, these texts do not necessarily suppose a young audience and therefore this created genre already fails in its elaboration of the “competent reader.” In general, this question of “Young Adult” or “Adolescent” fiction is outside of the scope of this dissertation; however, interested persons may consult the first section of the third chapter (“Chapter Three - Navigating Matrices: Fictional Youth and the Social Space of Flux”) which examines the figure of textual reader and the textually inscribed audience to much fuller extent.

reveals itself in the study of traditionally western *Bildungsroman* texts. At the same time, the frequent deployment of this distinctly western model in the reading of Latin American, Latino/a/x, and diasporic novels that deal with the figuration of youth cannot hope but to fail as their characters often cannot fully participate in the formative processes prescribed by what Moretti calls the “classical *Bildungsroman*” (Moretti 7).⁹ One approach certain critics have taken in an attempt to bridge traditions involves the creation or suggestion of strategies through which novels about youth experiences in Latin American literature may be approached.¹⁰ Essentially, both approaches lead to the same flawed result: the reading of Latin American, Latino/a/x, and diasporic novels of youth as “failed” *Bildungsroman* representative of a post-colonial difference that, in turn, serves to validate the cultural superiority of the west rather than focusing on the unique aesthetic advancements, challenges, themes, and characters as found within novels such as Rosario Castellanos’ *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]. Furthermore,

⁹ Moretti writes that the *Bildungsroman* “classification is strongest ... [when] narrative transformations... lead to a particularly marked ending: one that establishes itself a classification different from the initial one but nonetheless perfectly clear and stable” (Moretti 7). This “perfectly clear and stable” termination is found in the final assimilation of *Bildungsroman* characters to productive adult lives (7). Moretti describes “this teleological rhetoric – the meaning of events lies in their finality – is the narrative equivalent of Hegelian thought, with which it shares a strong *normative* vocation: events acquire meaning when they led to *one* ending, and *one* only” (7). Markers of the achievement of such an assimilation into a full adult life includes marriage, employment, and having children. Jerome Buckley, Todd Kontje, Gregory Castle and Marc Redfield have all written about these objectives in western literature and particularly in German, French, and British literary projects. Moretti’s more theoretical findings argue that the “symbolic legitimization” finds fruition not in the achievement of these trappings of social maturity, a term Moretti finds troubling in his late capitalist critique of the *Bildungsroman*, but in the establishment and maintenance of social stability and cohesion (Moretti 16).

¹⁰ Julia Kushigian produced a particularly useful analysis of Spanish American *Bidungsroman* in her book *Reconstructing Childhood: Strategies of Reading Culture and Gender in the Spanish American Bildungsroman*. While I argue that major readings of books such as José María Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] actively resist categorization as *Bildungsroman*, Kushigian’s book proves a highly useful study in the consideration of issues such as gender and sexuality when approached through a framework that prioritizes the development of the “Beautiful Soul,” a search not dissimilar from thoughtful analyses of 20th century European *Bildungsroman* such as Franco Moretti’s. For further information, see: Kushigian, Julia A. *Reconstructing Childhood: Strategies of Reading for Culture and Gender in the Spanish American Bildungsroman*. Bucknell University Press, 2003.

these works do not posit social assimilation and stability as a goal for their respective characters but rather much more frequently enact a subversive aesthetic through the critical consideration of traditional social structures extolled within even the “failed” *Bildungsroman* including most specifically the family, the Church, schools, and the State.

To address this specific gap in our literary knowledge, I examined canonical works of Latin American, Latino/a/x, and diasporic fiction and film. The primary corpus of texts considered includes: Rosario Castellanos’ *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] and her *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians],¹¹ José María Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”], Jorge Amado’s *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands], Cristina Peri Rossi’s *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children’s Rebellion], Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Roberto Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives], and César Aira’s *Cómo me hice monja* [How I Became a Nun]. The primary films include *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] and *Sin nombre* [Nameless].¹² As a result, and in writing this thesis, I came to see how these texts use youth as a locus of enunciation that connects

¹¹ Rosario Castellanos’ first novel, *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] derives its name from the ancient Mayan phrase “Balunem K’anal” which was translated into Spanish as “las nueve estrellas” [the nine stars] or “los nueve guardianes” [the nine guardians] (Scherer). Balunem K’anal was thus also the name of the valley that came to be known, in Spanish, as Comitán. The nine entities referred to were the hills surrounding the southern Mexican town which may be found in the state of Chiapas, on the border between Mexico and Guatemala. Comitán/Balunem K’anal was also the birthplace and family home of Rosario Castellanos.

¹² While the majority of the literary works considered in my project exist in English translation, very few have been translated more than once. As such, unless otherwise noted, all translated passages will come from the “standard” or most widely available translations. Full bibliographic information may be found in the Works Cited but as a brief introduction, the translations I use include the Frances Horning Barraclough translation of José María Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers]; Irene Nicholson’s translation of Rosario Castellanos’ *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians]; Esther Allen’s translation of Rosario Castellanos’ *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]; Gregory Rabassa’s translation of Jorge Amado’s *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]; Gregory Kolovakas and Ronald Christ’s translation of Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”]; Tobias Hecht’s abridged translation of Cristina Peri Rossi’s “La rebelión de los niños” [“The Children’s Rebellion”];¹² Natasha Wimmer’s translation of Roberto Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives]; and Chris Andrews’ translation of Cesar Aira’s *Cómo me hice monja* [How I Became a Nun].

to local praxes of self in relation to the given social situation under consideration within a text. The following paragraphs outline the project's trajectory and basic conclusions it will begin the process of illustrating these ideas by tying them to this Introduction's ongoing discussion of Idolina and Marcela as young women on particular thresholds.

In my project's first chapter (Chapter One - Approaching the In Between: Lives, Edges, and Liminality in the Consideration of Youth in Literature), I interrogate the pertinent critical tools that I turn to throughout my analysis. In particular, I engage with a critical genealogy of liminality that builds out of Arnold van Gennep's and Victor Turner's respective exploration of the term, which I then put into conversation with Michel Foucault's ideas about subjectivity. This reading supports a consideration of liminal subjectivity as principally evidenced by the youths considered in subsequent chapters. This chapter also permits me to engage with the particular and ever-evolving "rites of passage" which mark transitions and functionally establish an individual's liminal status. As an example of such rites, in Castellanos' *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations], Catalina steps in to resolve the situation of Marcela's out-of-wedlock pregnancy by quickly marrying her off to Lorenzo, Catalina's brother, an "inocente" [innocent],¹³ therefore creating a path of legitimizing the soon to be born infant as part of an established family, even if the baby Domingo's paternity remains known by Catalina, Marcela, and their immediate relations. In the text, Catalina considers the expediency of this arrangement:

Así que el matrimonio se efectuó. De allí en adelante Lorenzo tendría
quien velara por él. En Marcela no había hechuras todavía para ser algo

¹³ In Spanish, this term was commonly used to refer to persons with significant mental defects.

más de lo que Catalina se propusiera que fuese. Si pensaba en su suerte Marcela comprendería que tenía motivos para estar contenta de ella. ¿O es que iba a preferir el desdén, el escupitajo de los suyos sobre su deshonor? ¿O iba a soportar la intemperie del monte, la vergüenza de la mendicidad en pueblo de caxlanes? Aquí tenía asilo para su desvalimiento, nombre para cubrir su cabeza, título de esposa ante la gente... Ahora, si lo que quiere Marcela es satisfacción de hombre... pues que se aguante. Con algo ha de pagar lo que le falta (Castellanos *Oficio* 36).

[So the marriage took place. From now on, Lorenzo would have someone to look out for him. Marcela did not have what it would take to be anything more than what Catalina intended her to be. And if Marcela ever thought about her lot in life, she would understand that she had reason to be content with it. Or would she have preferred to have her family spit on her dishonor? Would she have been able to endure the harsh weather on the mountainside, the shame and beggary in a town of Caxláns? Here she had a place of refuge for her destitution, a name to cover her head, the title of wife to confront others with... Though if what Marcela wants is to have the satisfaction of a man... she will just have to control herself. She has to pay something for what she lacks (Castellanos *Book* 39).]

This passage shows how this social matrix viewed marriage not as an essentially sacred ritual but as a potential solution to the “problem” of a young girl who lost her virginity -

by force - to a man who would never be punished by the same system.¹⁴ Marcela is now defined by “what she lacks”, a nod to her stolen virginity. Given this reality, her options involve one of two rituals: she may either enter marriage through the ceremonies prescribed or she may be ritually excluded from her community for a life lived in isolation in the Chiapas mountains, an exclusion that would most certainly bring her quickly to death. Throughout this passage, rites provide the only way forward after Marcela’s rape. Moreover, in approximating our consideration of this character, I also consider in the first chapter an idea of colonial semiosis that reads youth characters as capable of possessing a shrewd understanding of their contextualized agency as well as a variety of personal and political priorities, such as those expressed by Idolina in her quest for parental revenge. Therefore, while Castellanos’ permits Marcela a certain amount of privacy in the logic of her decision of which rite to undergo: marriage or exclusion, the pluritopic hermeneutic of *colonial semiosis* permits us to acknowledge the character making that decision as involved even if we do not have immediate access in the narrative to her rationale for choosing the marriage.

The project’s second chapter (Chapter Two - Comparative Moments in the “Denaturalized” History of Adolescence) engages with praxes through which youth was defined in the “non-dialectically heterogeneous” situations of Colonial Lima and Ancient Greece. This chapter reexamines these non-corresponding historical social matrices as particular genealogies that contribute to a general but destabilized understanding of

¹⁴ In Castellanos’ first novel, *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] the text which speaks of a similar social setting elaborates upon how wealthy men Caxlán men customarily maintained mistresses. While neither text fully elaborates upon how often such relationships are forced upon the women, the lack of meaningful (or for that matter any) interactions between Caxlán men and indigenous women serves to highlight the general perversion inherent in the power differentials demonstrated by these sexual encounters.

childhood and adolescence. To briefly explain the selection of these sites, I have selected Ancient Greece as it contributed significantly to conversations regarding the origins of Western cultural praxes. The consideration of youth, in particular, resulted as we shall see from an effort to control through definition and social regimen the lives and sexual behavior of youths. Examining praxes through which adults constructed and controlled youth, and in particular young and adolescent girls, provides a means of examining the social and political discourse making processes at work in the creation of these ideas. In contrasting Ancient Greece with Colonial Lima, I explore similarities and differences regarding the treatment of youth and in particular am able to focus on Catholic understandings of youth including the idea of *potestad*, or patriarchal authority, that profoundly but subtly pervade all the novels and films considered by my project.

The third chapter (Chapter Three - Navigating Matrices: Fictional Youth and the Social Space of Flux) engages directly with five works of fiction in order to analyze how youth function as both protagonists and themes within these works. The chapter's five



Image II¹⁵

central works are: Cristina Peri Rossi's *La rebellion de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion (1979)], Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs" (1967)], José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers (1958)], and Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sand (1937)]. The chapter interrogates the presence and

interactions of a tripartite dynamic present in each text, focusing on the historical, textual audience, the characters' social matrix, and finally the young, central characters. As part

¹⁵ Image II source: Severi, Marcos, artista. "Viñeta: La juventud está perdida." <http://www.mseveri.com/vinetas?lightbox=dataItem-iiqd77p6>. Presented here with the artist's permission.

of this set of considerations, I engage with what Hans Robert Jauss calls the “horizon of expectations” in approaching each text as a part of an intertext. Additionally, I provide a critical definition for the term “social matrix” as used in different discourses but as particularly useful for the consideration of the complex interplay between a text’s characters. This chapter applies the theoretical framework created above in order to interrogate adults as parents and/or guardians, peers, or younger siblings as contributing elements to the social matrix within and against which the young characters define themselves. In its analysis of the deep discomfort and pervasive ambivalence on the part of nearly all the texts’ adults and specifically parents and guardians, this chapter concludes that, for the most part, these texts do not resolve the ambivalence but rather, by resisting the need for cohesive conclusions further reject the aesthetics of social unity.¹⁶

This chapter concludes that while youth certainly age over the course of these novels they do not necessarily develop. These texts suggest two possible ways of aging without developing. First, and in the trajectory most closely in line with the *Bildungsroman*, these texts show that youth may age out of childhood and adolescence but take paths of reform or resistance rather than assimilating into stable and, more significantly, stabilizing careers or life paths. At their conclusions, most of the third chapter’s texts portray their young protagonists not as fully assimilated adults but as young people who continue fighting against the systems they understood as repressive in their adolescence. They do so in the pursuit of professions known for being disruptive: as

¹⁶ Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] stands out from this chapter’s corpus as it is the only concluded tale in which all of its youth reach not only adulthood but a rather progressed middle age. This will certainly be examined, at depth, in Chapter Three. A brief explanation involves the argument that these characters’ acceptance of bourgeois norms does not lead to assimilation for the group but rather a dissolution of the social potential, as the surviving “cachorros” find themselves dispersed at the tale’s end.

journalists, writers, priests, and activists. A second and less frequently engaged trajectory involves characters who cannot or will not conform to traditional options permitted youth. Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" [The Cubs], for example, represents such a work in its presentation Cuéllar, a young boy who comes to be ostracized by his community following his accidental castration. Because this character does not possess the ability to have sexual relations with women, he cannot thus become a biological father and in the erasure of these two standard options the boy and his society cannot create alternative routes. Moreover, as his accidental castration reveals the possibility of such a horrendous accident Cuéllar further embodies a fear of castration that infuses his community and that cannot be ignored given his situation. He therefore comes to be additionally ostracized as a result.

Elements of the dynamic described in the paragraph above can certainly already be found throughout Castellanos' *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]. In their own ways, both Marcela and Idolina acquiesce to the traditional trajectories established for them in Chiapas but common to small Catholic towns and beyond. Following the rape, Marcela finds herself pregnant and is quickly thrown out of the home she shares with her nana.¹⁷ As mentioned above, she consents to be married to a "simple" man and therefore chooses to remain in her community. On the other hand, Idolina's situation although less physically devastated emerges as much more complicated due to the complexities of her family and their relation to the local social matrix. Because of her ethnicity, language, and her family's wealth and social status, Idolina possesses a

¹⁷ This is particularly tragic as Marcela remarks that her Nana had kept her home for longer than most girls her own age, a comment perhaps signifying either a close relationship or an economic interdependency that was destroyed in the wake of the rape.

significant level of privilege relative to Marcela. At the same time and even as the specific details of their situations differ significantly, Idolina, like Marcela, must grapple with the results of violence that profoundly reordered her family and that carries with it a deep shame. The novel gradually reveals the source of Idolina's pain and her deep anger in the revelation of the circumstances attending the death of her father, Isidoro Cifuentes. Prior to the events detailed by the novel, Isidoro died when a gun maintained by his brother Leonardo happens to go off.¹⁸ Quickly following this death Idolina's mother, Isabel, remarried Leonardo before the period of prescribed mourning had completely passed. Idolina's new situation places her in a difficult and wholly unstable set of circumstances. On the one hand, Idolina completely despises her stepfather and more

¹⁸ It is of no small significance that the passages describing Isabel's guilt and uncertainty regarding the circumstances of Isidoro's death also make frequent mention of the fact that Leonardo had been adopted by Isidoro's family. The text treats Leonardo's adoption into the Cifuentes family and his unknown origin as reasons for his extreme violence.

Todos admiraron la magnanimidad de los padres de Isidoro al acoger a Leonardo como crianza de su casa. Pero después nadie fue testigo de las pequeñas mezquindades, de la perenne comparación entre el hijo legítimo y el adoptivo, en la que el último tendría que salir siempre perdidoso. No se puede tratar así impunemente a una criatura tenida por todos como de inteligencia tan despejada y sentimientos tan vehementes. ¡Quién sabe qué sangre corría por las venas del huérfano! Acaso sangre más noble, más soberbia que la de sus benefactores. ¿Y qué le habían dado, aparte del apellido? La rústica educación de un vaquero. Mientras que al otro, a Isidoro, le dieron una carrera liberal. No pudo terminarla, no tenía la cabeza muy firme (Castellanos *Oficio* 65).

[The whole town admired the magnanimity of Isidoro's parents when they took Leonardo into their home as a small boy. But afterward, no one witnessed the small pettinesses, the constant comparisons between the legitimate and the adopted son, in which the latter always had to come out behind. A child whose sharp intelligence and vehement feelings were noticed by everyone cannot be treated that way without consequences. Who knows what blood runs through an orphan's veins? It might be more noble and more proud than the blood of his benefactors. And what had they given him, apart from their name? The crude education of a cowherd. While Isidoro was given a full, liberal education. He couldn't complete it; his intelligence was not very solid (Castellanos *Book* 66).]

This passage's final sentences, which appear to align with Leonardo's perspective, reveal his feelings of entitlement even if a legitimizing source for such a feeling, such as a noble family or understanding of his history, remains wholly absent. Ultimately, the wealth and prestige that the remaining Cifuentes brother brandishes throughout the novel and that permit him to act without fear of consequences is thus consistently undermined in the constant questioning of his legitimacy by the text and its treatment of Leonardo's adoption into the Cifuentes family.

than probably blames him for her father's death as Isabel, in an ill-conceived attempt to alieve herself of her own pain and guilt, "primero al través de complicadas alusiones, más tarde en impúdicas confidencias en las que latía" ["first in complicated allusions, later in shameless confidences"] her suspicions regarding Leonardo's involvement in Isidoro's death (Castellanos *Oficio* 67; Castellanos *Book* 76). Still and on the other hand, Idolina who as a young child is described repeatedly as possessing a shrewd intelligence along with a strange and "muy precozmente [entendimiento] de ausencia ["very precocious understanding of absence"], blames her mother for the situation in which they find themselves and determines to "castigar, al través de sí misma, la conducta de su madre" ["use her own body to punish her mother's conduct"] (Castellanos *Oficio* 66, 78; Castellanos *Book* 75, 88).

In enacting such a punishment against her mother, Idolina's actions both represent the complete breakdown of traditional family and social structures and react to the fact that this collapse has already come to pass. Usually, parents punish children in order to correct errant behavior while promoting, through the negative reinforcement of the punishment, values such as honesty, obedience, respect, and subservience. These values are widely understood as the central tenants to a functional, cohesive society but at the same time serve as a means of control in that they ensure the continuation of dominant paradigms including the patriarchal family, the Church, or the State. Idolina's actions reverse the traditional course of punishment and, in the process, reveal the deep social breeches already present in this family. At the same time and somewhat paradoxically, Idolina's actions also serve to maintain the same value system that so limits any actual social progress in Ciudad Real in that she punishes her mother for betraying her father

without permitting her any recourse through which Isabel could make amends.¹⁹ As we will see in the third chapter, these systems of punishments, deterrents, and even rewards all function in to sustain traditional hierarchical social structures and the values that permit their propagation.

The project's fourth chapter (Chapter Four – Forever Young? Immanent Liminalities as Horizons as Escape) removes the assumption of youth's temporariness. This section examines the social and personal distortions that result when individuals or groups rebel against the transcendental processes of liminality, refusing to participate in “maturing” processes either in response to a lack of social options or as a matter of choice. In this analysis, I consider examine writings from Roberto Bolaño and Junot Díaz as well as the films *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] and *Sin nombre* [Nameless]. My analysis concludes that youth and adults in states of “arrested development,” such as Díaz's doomed Oscar Wao, but by extension the novel's other three protagonists - Lola, Yunior, and Hypatía, mother of the former two characters - function to critique rigid societies that fail to provide viable alternatives outside of traditional norms and create scenarios of arrested development in the creation or elaboration of painful circumstances that cannot, or will not, be overcome. This chapter will further engage with the intersection between gender and race creates a social situation that limits social mobility and that condemns characters to relive negative aspects of their respective adolescences.

¹⁹ Isabel's interactions with her priest are juxtaposed throughout the two chapters that reveal the circumstances of Isidoro's death, Isabel's remarriage, and Idolina's decision upon a punishment for her mother. In both the priest's words and Idolina's actions, judgment and restriction dominate and thus condemn Isabel to life with an abusive husband and angry daughter rather than permitting anyone the relief of divorce, relocation, or separation.

Certain elements of this immanent *telos* and the way it inscribes itself upon female bodies may already be glimpsed in Castellanos' *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]. Throughout this book the physical presence and situation of having a body plays a significant role in the literal figurations of both conflict and resistance. Castellanos' text highlights this in several passages. For example, the punishment Idolina enacts against Isabel is not found as the reader may initially suspect in Idolina's mysterious paralysis but rather in her decision to keep secret the fact that she eventually improves enough and relearns to walk. The text reveals that

El día en que Idolina dio los primeros pasos por la alcoba no fue el día en que triunfó su voluntad de salud, sino en que encontró la fórmula de conciliación entre esa voluntad y su seseo de castigar, al través de sí misma, la conducta de su madre. Y esta fórmula no consistía más que en mantener secreto aquel acontecimiento (Castellanos *Oficio* 78).

[The day Idolina took her first steps through the bedroom was not the day her will to be healthy finally won out, but the day when she found the formula which reconciled that will with her desire to use her own body to punish her mother's conduct. The formula consisted of nothing more than keeping the fact that she could walk a secret (Castellanos *Book* 88).]

This passage takes place almost immediately after another illuminating paragraph in which Idolina sees the length of her body for the first time.

Cuando Idolina se vio por primera vez de pie, reflejada en el espejo del armario, se espantó. Su cuerpo era muy distinto a como ella lo experimentaba desde adentro. Su estatura se exageraba por la forma del camisón largo y suelto. En su cara, consumida por los años de encierro y sufrimiento, un par de ojos enormes, zarcos, perpetuamente brillantes por la fiebre, eran el único signo de belleza, una belleza atormentada y singular (Castellanos *Oficio* 77-78).

[“When Idolina saw herself standing up for the first time, reflected in the wardrobe mirror, she was frightened. Her body looked very different from the way she experienced it from within. Her height was exaggerated by the long, loose shape of the nightgown. In her face, gnawed by the years of enclosure and suffering, a pair of enormous pale blue eyes, perpetually incandescent with fever, were the only sign of beauty, a tormented and singular beauty” (Castellanos *Book* 80).]

These two paragraphs emphasize Idolina’s discovery, first of her body and then of its ability to function as a tool. In fact, Idolina comes to realize her body’s power as the ideal weapon in her ongoing battle against her mother as the following chapters show how Idolina begins to develop both her strength and her beauty in order to manipulate people around her, a plan she pursues through the selection of a wholly inappropriate, first friend, “La Alazana”, her stepfather’s latest mistress who flaunts a brazen sexuality not found with frequency in the conservative setting of Ciudad Real. In the acts of going

through the streets with this poorly reputed woman, Idolina shames her mother while simultaneously further revealing the extent to which Ciudad Real's social codes have broken down.

In the project's fifth chapter (Courtesy, the Corrosive Virtue: César Aira's *Cómo me hice monja* [How I became a Nun] and the Decay of Young Bodies) which functions as a concluding interlude, I read Aira's novel *Cómo me hice monja* [How I became a Nun] as part of a trajectory of Latin American and Latino/a/x liminal narratives, the study of which has already begun already in this introduction. Aira's prose presents a natural progression of the themes and topics considered at the heart of this project. His work permits a final reflection on topics including rites of passage, initiation and exclusion, liminality, and virtues in the context of the social matrix. Consequently, as I begin my project with the consideration of youth as they operate in the darkness of Castellanos' prose, I conclude by showing how and why these forms finally disintegrate when viewed in connection with the death of a child.

My project concludes that major writers and filmmakers employ liminal characters to enact an aesthetic praxis that incorporates specific elements of narrative, character development, tone, and perspective in order to reflect on challenging social problems and to question particular literary and social traditions. As I will show, setting the *Bildungsroman* permits a concerted, thoughtful, and reinvigorated engagement with canonical texts that, in turn, permits a reevaluation of their central aesthetic and cultural projects. Additionally, I will show how these texts handle the proliferation of boundaries, barriers, and brinks as occurring in the 20th and 21st centuries and as part of a broader

project through which young characters may be considered as part of the contemporary scenarios that produced them.

Before commencing with the study that follows, it is important to note that while the critical study of literature has yet to fully engage the figure of the liminal child or adolescent as a crucial element of serious consideration to the study of significant works produced by novelists, short story writers, and poets apart from the paradigm of the *Bildungsroman*, film and cinema studies has, in contrast, produced a significant amount of criticism engaging questions of subjectivity, agency, and perspective in Latin American film while also acknowledging the burgeoning production and study of films centralizing youth of the past few decades. Carolina Rocha and Georgia Seminet's collaborations on the edited books *Representing History, Class, and Gender in Spain and Latin American: Children and Adolescents in Film* (2012) and more recently their *Screening Minors in Latin American Cinema* (2014) have significantly contributed to the discussion of these questions as crucial to the study of contemporary film and particularly films of the last two to three decades. These works recognize in the proliferation of significant, canonical films that centralize figures of youth – films such as Pedro Almodóvar's *Y tu mamá también*, Andrés Wood's *Machuca*, Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas' *Linha de Passe*, Cao Hamburger's *ano em que meus pais saíram de férias*, Walter Salles' *Central do Brasil*, and Lucrecia Martel's *XXY* among many others – a similar and related but not identical treatment of youth and its varied connections to social matrices.

Given the formal distinctions extant between the fields of literature and film, film critics have been able to avoid, for the most part, the critical overreliance on the

Bildungsroman at least explicitly. As several of the articles included in these books (such as Walescka Pino-Ojeda's "'Be a man!': Masculinities and Class Privileges in Postcoup Chilean Cinema" and Juli A. Kroll's "Embodying Childhood Social Agency in Gustavo Loza's *Al otro lado*") demonstrate, the dominant cinematic narrative involving adolescents and children is the story of "coming of age" in which a young person overcomes serious obstacles *en route* to a maturity culminating with the 'end of innocence', usually involving their arrival to a new state intellectual awareness or nascent sexual identity.²⁰ At the same time, this narrative trajectory occurs within films that the critics acknowledge as platforms through which "the desires and fears of adults are manifested" thereby complicating the young figure with matrices similar to those that I analyze within my project (Rocha and Seminet *Representing* 1). While accepting the centrality of adult considerations, the writers and editors of this tome critique "coming of age" narratives, often citing Lesko's theories for support, through many thoughtful essays showing how youth agency may work subversively in films, at once "offer[ing] a critique of progress and coming-of-age films" while also examining the sometimes ambivalent relationships youth forge with their social matrices (Kroll "Embodying" 134).²¹ For example, in her article "Embodying Childhood Social Agency in Gustavo Loza's *Al otro lado*" Juli A.

²⁰ In fact, these films usefully show how "films about the middle-class often revolve around a sexual coming-of age, [while] those featuring the working-class tend to focus on violence and criminality" (Thomas "Yo No Soy Invisible" 58). Implicit in this critique and particularly relevant to the consideration of Brazilian cinema involves a consideration of the intersection of class, race, and ethnicity as well as gender, as these considerations remain highly transactional in the consideration of these films and their narrative projects.

²¹ As a reminder, Lesko critiques "coming-of-age" narratives as complicit in the suggestion and elaboration of an "ideology of emergence, which is the belief that teenagers are naturally emerging outside of social influences," as they often work in concert with the "other social institutions, such as the media... [in order to] reinfantilize youth" in service to broader regimes of social control (Lesko *Act 3*; 140). The *Bildungsroman* like the "coming-of-age" film thus participate in the problematic "idea of adolescence" and even childhood "as always becoming (and not really existing in the present)" that a focus on liminal youth or youth agency, as the various studies compiled by Rocha and Seminent suggest, functionally returns to the present (Pino-Ojeda "Be" 89).

Kroll shows how “*Al otro lado* demonstrates children’s understanding and action as fundamental to resisting family disintegration...[the] children move toward knowledge as a form of resistance and as a means of child-centric, tactical participation in both local and global citizenships” (134). The child’s resistance as analyzed here emerges as a cohesive stabilization and maintenance of the family’s centrality even if the family itself may be “reimagined” through the “deconstruction of patriarchal roles” (134).

My project complements these thoughtful and provocative essays as well as the broader and emerging conversation regarding youth as represented in film and literature through the further elaboration of a schematic understanding of liminal figures as possessing agency and also a variety of motivations and objectives. To that end, in my first chapter I consider the necessity of what Walter Mignolo calls the “pluritopic hermeneutics” in order to acknowledge and examine works in which characters and the texts that present them enact a range of discursive praxes in order to elaborate these projects in service of broader goals. This also anticipates and explains the necessity of the consideration of audience as I perform in the beginning of the third chapter. Rocha and Seminet anticipated this question of how the viewer is prefigured and began their first book, *Representing History, Class, and Gender in Spain and Latin America: Children and Adolescents in Film* with the explicit question of “Who is the intended audience for these films, and what happens when adults view children and adolescents on screen?” (Rocha and Seminet *Representing* 1). While the answer certainly involves adults, it is also important to acknowledge that these are both “ideal and competent” readers of film while adolescents and youth themselves may, sometimes, also be part of this viewership and therefore at least important for partial consideration. In the elaboration of the

“horizon of expectations” that function within these films, it does seem prudent therefore to also include at least passing consideration of how images and narratives of youth coming from Latin America claim or delink connection to the Hollywood exportation of the category of teenager as Hollywood’s hegemonic standing in the production and global export of popular images of individualized teenaged youth can certainly be found, for example, in literature such as Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [The Cubs] when the boys explicitly mention James Dean’s portrayal of *The Rebel Without a Cause*, and thus engage one of the most important and problematic figures of adolescence produced in the 20th century. In her essay “Bordering Adolescence: Latin American Youth in Road Films *La misma luna* and *Sin nombre*” included in Rocha and Seminet’s more recent *Screening Minors in Latin American Cinema*, Laura Senio Blair comes the closest to this consideration with her comment that “many Latin American road movies... borrow[ed] Hollywood’s filmic blueprint for expressing young adult rebellion against constrictive social norms and oppressive social circumstances” yet she misses the point that, by doing so, Hollywood often managed to negate the potential of actual social change by expressly commenting on the pointlessness of these teenage uprisings. Ultimately, Hollywood’s idea of the teenager, which remains powerfully present today, involves the elaboration of young people as consumers with little critical taste let alone social perspective. Hollywood has thus peddled a dominant and socially expedient idea that treats teenagers as mechanical consumers rather than subjects with a potential agency. To fully address questions of agency and particularly praxes of self that emphasize social groups rather than individuals thus requires a consideration of young people as subjects such as found throughout these essays. At the same time, if these characters are to be considered as

multivalent and as possessing multiple objectives and goals then a schematic is needed to consider their trajectories apart from those in which cohesive, traditional, cohesive and transcendently teleological norms are simply repeated *ad nauseum* and with little variation. To that end, literature and critical literary studies provide an important missing link that addresses this gap while further contextualizing films such as those studied by the writers curated by Rocha and Seminet within the local praxes that produced them. With this in mind, I will now turn to works of literature and film and the critical tools that both further the study of literature and that are also further honed through the study of narrative works.

Chapter One

Approaching the In Between: Lives, Edges, and Liminality in the Consideration of Youth in Literature

In the act of completing her 1979 book, *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion], Cristina Peri Rossi faced a challenge familiar to writers whose art touches upon life's brutalities: how to explain the premonitory acumen with which an unpublished yet previously finished work of fiction explained subsequent social and political developments that had been considered entirely implausible but a year or two before they occurred. In a note inserted just before the book's final and titular story, the author specifically reflects upon how a story she composed in the earliest moments of the tumultuous 1970s anticipated so much of what came next: a military coup in the writer's home country of Uruguay; political violence, deaths and disappearances in neighboring countries; proxy wars between two world powers, and the devastating arrival of cocaine to the richest and poorest communities in Latin America.¹ Writing from exile in Spain, Peri Rossi explains

¹ The cultivation of the *coca* plant significantly predates the European conquest as "las hojas de coca.... Han sido utilizadas durante milenios como recurso nutricional, médico y elemento ceremonial psicoactivo por los pueblos indios del área andino" [coca leaves... have been used by the indigenous peoples of the Andean region over the millennia as a source of nutrition and medicine, and as a ceremonially psychoactive element] (Cáceres 114). In contrast with the more basic plant form as traditionally used in teas and general remedies across the Andes, the production of the narcotic drug requires the chemical isolation of the alkaloid called cocaine which, obviously, gives the drug its name. This process was first described by a German chemist at the University of Gottingen and was successfully produced for the first time by an Italian Doctor who had worked for the Botica y Droguería Boliviana (Cabieses Cubas 15-16). The drug was originally touted as a curative for a wide range of maladies including headaches and hysteria before its

“Los hechos políticos, en mi país y en los países vecinos, han convertido lo que pudo ser exaltada imaginación, fábula delirante, en triste realidad. No es mi culpa.... No hay ningún orgullo en haber inventado una fábula literaria que luego los militares se encargaron de copiar infamemente. Ni ellos ni yo inventamos nada. Este horror ya existió otras veces” (Peri Rossi 105).

[Political events in my country and its neighbors have turned an act of lofty imagination, a delirious fable, into a sad reality. That is not my fault... There is no pride in having invented a literary fable that the military later infamously took charge of copying. Neither they nor I have invented anything. This horror already existed at other times.]

This epistle interrupts the book’s series of short stories and serves to highlight the particular importance of the final story in which two adolescents meet because of a government sponsored artistic exhibition. In “La rebelión de los niños” [“The Children’s Rebellion”], which will be discussed at length in this dissertation’s third chapter, the state provides the backdrop for a chance meeting that leads to its own annihilation but also the liberation and obliteration of the story’s two, young protagonists.

Cristina Peri Rossi’s epistolary interjection touches upon many of this dissertation’s key themes. The letter simultaneously introduces and interrupts a book of

addictive properties came to be fully known (15-16). Recreational demand for the drug from Cosmopolitan centers and the ready supply of the plant material created a blackmarket for the drug, while its illegal trafficking by air, water, and land brought with it a tremendous amount of violence. See Chapter Four’s discussion of generations of adolescents in the Brazilian film *Cidade de Deus* [City of God].

fictions concerning youth rebellions that itself focuses on the crucial importance of context in the formation of methods for social critique. Moreover, this letter and the story it describes show how a matrix of actors including the textually inscribed author, her “compañeros de viaje” [travel companions], and even the military junta, may be read as part of an unstable but shared textual plane that anticipates without invention the difficult historical phenomena found within it such that, as the author notes, “este horror ya existió otras veces” [this horror already existed at other times] (Peri Rossi 105).

In Latin American and Latino/a/x literature, figures of youth such as the children and adolescents found throughout Cristina Peri Rossi’s text function as a locus of enunciation from which fiction often presents incisive social criticism. One reason for this involves the fact that figures of youth have some ability to move fluidly even in restrained social situations due to their age, which functions exceptional, liminal situation in which these young people are recognized as members of their society that explicitly lack the full responsibilities and the complete rights of full membership, a status reserved for adults.² These young characters occupy a crucial interstitial space between childhood, long assumed to be an age of innocent deference, and adulthood with its supposedly assimilated acceptance of social realities. Read closely, young fictional characters from Castellanos’ *Idolina* to Peri Rossi’s militant adolescents challenge these assumptions and often act as sharp, critical observers of their own situations.

An examination of the social matrices developed in a range of novels, novellas, short stories, and films from Spanish America, Brazil, and the United States reveals how

² As we will see particularly in Chapters Two and Three of this dissertation, this idea of social maturity defined by the attainment of adulthood has, for most of history including large parts of the 20th century, applied primarily to a society, and more recently a country’s, male elites as it often excluded women or members of particular social minorities.

these fictions actively problematize both assumptions of childhood naïveté and adult assimilation. This focus further uncovers how young characters act from the space of their own social margin in order to comment on and, occasionally, to rebel against social traditions that they show to be unjust, untenable, and deeply flawed. Approaching these characters as central actors in their own stories shows how the persistence of particular colonial and patriarchal traditions into the 20th and even 21st centuries creates social and personal imbalances that young characters must address in the forging of new ways of being in their world. This idea has already been suggested in the Introduction to this dissertation but will be further examined using the critical approach crafted within this chapter.

Three key factors must be considered in approaching figures of youth in literature. First, the consideration of these characters necessarily involves engaging with representations created by an “other” and not from within the cohort or community itself. This results from the fact that writers of these fictions are, by and large, adults.³ Second, the dominant approach to the serious and scholarly consideration of young characters involves examining them in the light of “coming to age” narratives which preconfigure narrative trajectories that presume innocence as the individual foundation and maturity as the goal. These presumptions, as we shall see, often limit our ability to engage deeply

³ Such an observation is most certainly not made in any effort to diminish the artistic works produced by young writers, artists, and filmmakers. People under the age of 25 have contributed significantly to the literary, film, and visual arts around the world. That being said and due largely to their age, youth will certainly have spent less time in the pursuit of their artistic work than a writer in the middle of their professional life. In addition, youth may also lack access to means of literary production and dissemination including resources such as publishing houses, galleries, and agents, resources more readily available to adult artists in most artistic fields. Future research will consider young writers, artists and filmmakers, and the early (“young”) writings of established artists. Anecdotally, in my own work I have observed that many writers such as Rosario Castellanos and José María Arguedas use young characters early in their own artistic careers.

with the more critical and socially urgent projects involved in the writing of youth. Third and finally, although young voices narrate serious, canonical works of fiction in practically every canon of national and transnational literature, the linguistic and rhetorical simplicity of these narrative voices sometimes results in their marginalization from serious academic study. To this final point, several of the books my dissertation considered have been read in relation to the paradigm of the *Bildungsroman*, the popular Western literary tradition following the individual's development of a "world view." Such accommodation processes suggested by the "strategies for reading" seems to offer these books the opportunity for serious scholarly consideration by associating them with a widely studied form in the Western canon. However, because my central texts either profoundly complicate assimilation into adulthood such as in the case of José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] or adamantly deny their characters a means of narrative progression such as we find with Castellanos' *Idolina* or Junot Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, the process of reading such books in relation to traditions that stress assimilation and maturity ultimately fails to describe or to fully engage with the projects enacted specifically within these texts. As such although strategies for reading these as *Bildungsroman* permit one approach, I argue for another approach that emphasizes these novels as 'novels of liminality.'

All of the challenges described in the paragraph above stem from a similar misconception of youth prototypical adults depicted in the process of their own formation. Read closely, literary representations such as those we have already seen from *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations], challenge these assumptions and in particular the latter two. To this end, Chapters Three and Four will consider how time and

narrative distance function to complicate the youth voice. As we will see, these texts almost always employ a common strategy of narrative time that disconnects events from their telling so that the ‘young’ narrator is actually most often a voice narrating youth rather than at least necessarily being the voice of a young character. At present, however, it is the first issue – the question of approaches to represented characters – that requires careful and a detailed theoretically balanced approach. To begin considering these characters, I suggest a theory of liminal agency. This theory permits an examination of represented characters via a framework examining their interstitial situation as liminal agents who move within their own particular social space. In the pages that follow, I elaborate upon the set of theoretical concepts that I will put into conversation with the literature I consider through this project. Considering and briefly examining the genealogy of concepts including among others liminality, rites, subject, and agency, allows me to examine how these characters function within the context of their own social matrices and relative to the texts that produce them.

Approaching the Liminal: A Genealogy of the Concept

Cristina Peri Rossi’s short stories testify to the existence of liminal spaces occupied by children and youth in literature. The concept of liminality which will be crucial to this work’s literary exploration first emerged from Arnold van Gennep’s groundbreaking work on *Rites of Passage* (1908). In this work, the anthropologist attempted to suggest a system for understanding all existing social rites. Van Gennep’s project involved focusing particularly on social rites that mark human transitions (“rites of passage”), and that thus include many lengthy passages in exploring how puberty functions as one of many such liminal rites. An extensive genealogy of the idea of liminality thus starts with

Gennep before moving to consider the writings of Victor Turner, who developed van Gennep's concept for his own intellectual purposes. Turner revitalized the concept and in its renaissance different fields of study and their internal schools of thought adopted the concept albeit with distinct understandings and specific adaptations. Ultimately, I argue that a genealogy of the idea of liminality serves to destabilize the presumably favorable position of adolescents as ideally positioned to illustrate the concept of liminality. In addition, and to this end, as the contemporary French philosopher Tristan Garcia argues, adolescence has in fact emerged as the "maximum of the individual" supplanting adulthood which Garcia notes occupied this position until the present (Garcia 385).⁴

In the following section, I engage in a critical genealogy of the idea of liminality which follows the course previously described. This process is fundamental to my project as I later consider literary adolescent subjects who occupy particular liminal modes as sites of enunciation from which they speak to, of, or against more mainstream social discourse. Thus, as we will see in Chapter Three, Ernesto, the narrating character of José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], for example, explores his relationship to a Peruvian society split brutally across linguistic and ethnic lines, showing in the process of his own explorations significant faults and follies inherent in these discourses. *Cidade de Deus* [City of God's] narrator also makes similar use of the margin while negotiating his own relationship to the increasingly violent "boca de fumo," or hierarchical drug organization that has come to power in his favela. Both of these

⁴ This statement certainly seems to account for the "Adolescent Turn" or the recent "(re)discovery" of the adolescent and the increasing attention paid to adolescents through the fields of neuroscience, biology, anthropology, sociology, and so forth. Literary studies and fictionally represented adolescents anticipate some of these new scientific understandings particularly relating to the idea of a lengthy period of adolescent brain development that extends into a person's mid 20s in that representations of youth over the past century have concerned themselves with the liminality of this group and the extension of youth past the age of legal majority. The fourth chapter will engage with this lengthening.

characters and many others we examine navigate their liminal status while simultaneously grappling with personal choices regarding their own participation in their respective societies. I contend that understanding both the spatial and temporal aspects of liminality permit a closer engagement with the literary characters and works that provide this dissertation's focus.

The understanding and very nature of the liminal space may be impacted by the individual needs, ideas, preferences, and demands of the characters who occupy it. This occurs as even the most fleeting pass through such spaces becomes a dynamic process that necessarily includes (inter)personal and even societal feedback loops that challenge the liminal structure itself. These challenges may permit the young liminal characters to emerge via certain teleological routes that lead to lives of social or literary activism.

Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] and Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] both explicitly leave their respective protagonists *en route* to such lives. However, other characters either cannot or will not select such paths. Thus in Chapter Four, I show how particular literary characters forge identities in the liminal spaces that are defined by a particular moment of non-transcendental revolutionary potential, described to some extent by Victor Turner, that permits these characters a means to remain in the same spaces that produce them.⁵ As we

⁵ Each work of literature, however brief, includes multiple moments in which the adolescent or child character comes into contact with his, her, or their social matrix and in which they begin to mold spaces for themselves within the ongoing development of the matrix. These encounters and the individual responses range from moments of positive creation, discovery, or innovation to the negative such as a rebellion, incursion, occupation, or invasion. Yet, as I will show the nature of these interactions function within the literature to demarcate the liminal space and its existence in particular social imaginaries. For example, *The Rebel without a Cause* has been read as the film *par excellence* demonstrating the rebellious potential of adolescence (or more particularly in the United States' social milieu, of "teenager-hood"). Yet the title frames both the protagonist's nihilistic approach but also invites a proper, normalized response of social concern and/or rejection for this same nihilism. In this way, a particular practice of liminal demarcation

will see in my analysis of the 2009 film *Sin nombre* [Nameless] and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, these characters come to act as a communal entity defined to some extent by a lack of teleological alternatives.

localized to “Hollywood” permits and encourages an external response that would, in fact, serve to separate two communities based on age: adult and teenager.

A Genealogy of the Liminal⁶

To begin considering liminality, I turn initially to the work of Arnold van Gennep, who, in his 1908 book *The Rites of Passage*, attempted to engage systematically with “all the ceremonial patterns which accompany a passage from one situation to another or from one cosmic or social world to another” (10).⁷ His purpose was the correction of a discursive problem that contextualized the field of anthropology at the beginning of the 20th century. The problem, as van Gennep saw it, involved his field’s “lack of knowledge necessary to [the construction of] a definitive classification of rites” (van Gennep 4). Van Gennep resolves this issue through a series classificatory steps.

First, van Gennep asserts that rites should be classified as either “sympathetic”, a category of acts that involved a “belief in the reciprocal action of like on like, of opposite on opposite, of the container and the contained, of the part and the whole of image and

⁶ Replacing his early idea regarding an “archaeology” as process of investigation, Michel Foucault saw genealogies as a means of approaching “specific beginnings” without needing to look for totalized “definitive, original identities” (Scott “Genealogy” 166). The process of examining an idea’s genealogy thus permits an understanding of a beginning point not as a point of total unity but of “disparity” (Foucault *Language* 142). This allows for the development of subsequent characteristics or praxes around an idea to be evaluated as “fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms” (142) so that ruptures, discontinuities, and paradoxes may be part non-totalized parts of an idea’s genealogical tradition rather than its archeological definition. Rudi Visker argues that Foucault’s examination of the multiple potentialities (or disparities) present in the examination of specific beginning permits the author a means of critical examination that does not totalize or resubstantiate an idea of origin as complete. See Visker, R. *Michel Foucault: Genealogy as Critique*. Translation Chris Turner. Verso, 1995.

⁷ While the focus of his work is clearly rites of transition or rites of passage, van Gennep locates his study within a rich intellectual conversation that took place from the mid- 19th century onward and which focused on the varied relationship between sacred and profane practices across a variety of societies. In general, his work like that of his contemporaries, anthropologists including Sir Edward Burnett Tylor, Albert Réville, and Felix Liebrecht, viewed civilizations in a hierarchical structure ranging from the “least advanced”, more often referred to by other writers from this mid-19th century to the early 20th century period as “primitive”, to the most advanced. Such a hierarchical understanding underscores assertions such as van Gennep’s comment that “as we move downward on the scale of civilizations (taking the term ‘civilization’ in the broadest sense), we cannot fail to note an ever-increasing domination of the secular by the sacred. We see that in the least advanced cultures the holy enters nearly every phase of a man’s life. Being born, giving birth, and hunting... are all acts whose major aspects fall within the sacred sphere” (van Gennep 2). Even as the schematics sometimes attempted to incorporate European or American activities within their theories these intellectual activities always did so in a way that privileged the experience of Western society as belonging in higher echelons of the hierarchical civilizational structure.

real object or real being, or word and deed” (van Gennep 4), or “contagious”, a category that are “characteristically based on a belief that natural or acquired characteristics are material and transmissible (either through physical contact or over a distance)” (7). In selecting “sympathetic/contagious” as a primary category, van Gennep resituated Anthropology’s previous centralization of the “animistic/dynamistic” dichotomy as the field’s fundamental division through which all rituals and rites would be considered. His argument ultimately reintroduced these concepts only after contextualizing them amidst other relevant classificatory considerations: positive or negative rites and direct or indirect rites.⁸ As van Gennep explains

A single rite may fall simultaneously into four categories...according to the table below

Animistic rites	
Sympathetic rites	Contagious rites
Positive rites	Negative rites
Direct rites	Indirect Rites
Dynamistic rites	

For instance, a pregnant woman abstaining from eating mulberries for fear that her child would be disfigured is performing a rite which is at the same

⁸ Briefly, a “direct rite” may be “a curse or a spell [that] is designed to produce results immediately, without intervention by any outside agent” while “an indirect rite” such as a “vow, prayer, or religious service... is a kind of initial blow which sets into motion some autonomous or personified power, such as a demon, a group of jinn, or a deity, who intervenes on behalf of the performer” (van Gennep 8). These rites also have distinctly different consequences, as “the effect of the direct rite is automatic; that of an indirect rite comes as a repercussion” (8). Additionally, positive rites represent actions taken “or volitions translated into action” while negative rites, better known as “taboos” represent actions avoided, albeit passively, in order to assist in the fruition of the positive rite (8-9). As van Gennep explains, “a taboo is not autonomous, it exists only as a counterpart to a positive rite” (8-9).

time dynamistic, contagious, direct, and negative. A sailor who has been in danger of perishing in a shipwreck and as a consequence of a vow offers a small boat to Our Lady of Vigilance (Mary, Star of the Sea) is performing an animistic, sympathetic, indirect, and positive rite. (9).

This elaborate classificatory system, which will be returned to throughout this project in the consideration of various rites, provides an instrumental framework that enables van Gennep's primary goal: examining rites of passage or rites of transition across a broad swatch of societies so as to provide theoretical space for differences he argues that other "authors as a rule include only... [when they] serve [the authors'] purpose" (10).⁹ These rites are most directly observed in literature in either their traditional expressions, such as when Marcela marries Lorenzo, marking the end of her youth and also "nombre para cubrir su cabeza, título de esposa ante la gente" (Castellanos *Oficio* 36) ["a name to cover her head, the title of wife to confront others with" (Castellanos *Book* 39)]. Following van Gennep's scheme, such a rite is positive, indirect, and dynamistic. *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] presents the most disturbing ritual in Catalina's crucifixion of Domingo, to whom she has acted as a guardian up until the moment of his death after he was almost entirely abandoned by his mother Marcela following his birth. The text closely follows Catalina's and Domingo's perspectives through the crucifixion scene as the former ponders the whole situation thinking

⁹ Dichotomies such as these functioned descriptively in Van Gennep's work and were found commonly in anthropological studies in the first half of the 20th century; at the same time as Jacques Derrida's work shows such distinctions, viewed from a distance, lose some quality of distinction. At the same time, and as Derrida often noted with frustration, dichotomies come to be so much part of our thinking that "we have no way of thinking apart from them" (Gutting 299).

El bastardo de un caxlán de Jobel; la deshonra de una muchacha de su raza; la vergüenza oculta de Lorenzo; el reproche de su marido, su propia llaga. Si la llaga que no cesa de sangrar, que no cicatriza nunca porque Domingo está presente siempre (Castellanos *Oficio* 308-309).

[“The bastard of a Caxlán from Jobel [Ciudad Real]; the dishonor of a girl of her own race [Marcela]; Lorenzo’s hidden shame; her husband’s reproach; her own open wound. The open wound that never stops bleeding, that never scars over, because Domingo is always there” (Castellanos *Book* 345).]

This ritual is thus positive in that it requires an act, rather than an abstention. It is vaguely animistic as the actual purpose does not explicitly emerge from the text but can be found in the attempts to rectify a cosmological disorder. The crucifixion is sympathetic in that it only can apply to this situation and indirect as the actual recipient of the action perishes so that its purpose must reside elsewhere. Finally, although somewhat less useful, this schema can also be shown as the reason behind Yuniór’s writing and compilation of the texts that comprise *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. He notes at various points that writing the experience permits him a means of keeping the “fukú” away and so this rite can be defined as animistic, contagious, negative, and direct. This rite may be viewed through the schema as animistic, direct, and positive as it postulates an animate entity – the fukú which will be discussed at length in the fourth chapter – that can be warded off from Yuniór and perhaps even the Cabral family by the telling of the stories included in

the novel. This is also certainly a contagious rite in that it moves from character to character as Oscar initially attempted a similar feat but died before its completion. The major difference between the two manuscripts involves the disappearance of Oscar's work and Yuniór's storage of his texts in old refrigerators in his basement.

Van Gennep asserts his own theory regarding the "characteristic patterns in the order of ceremonies" which emerges most clearly when rituals are considered using taxonomy described above (van Gennep 11). In particular Van Gennep argues that such "*rites of passage*" could be broken down into three subcategories: "*rites of separation*" or "preliminal rites"; "*transition rites*" or "liminal rites", and finally "*rites of incorporation*" or "postliminal rites" (11). Cautioning his reader that the "subcategories are not developed to the same extent by all peoples or in every ceremonial patter, van Gennep wrote

Rites of separation are prominent in funeral ceremonies, rites of incorporation at marriages. Transition rites may play an important part, for instance, in pregnancy, betrothal, and initiation; or they may be reduced to a minimum in adoption, in the delivery of a second child, in remarriage, or in the passage from the second to the third age group. Thus, although a complete scheme of rites of passage theoretically includes preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation), in specific instances these three types are not always equally important or equally elaborated (11).

In general, and throughout his book, van Gennep demonstrates a general tendency of pre-industrial societies to recognize and elaborate upon these steps in sacred or animistic modes with post-industrial societies incorporating less formal rites into generally secular or dynamist modes. For example, going away to school in either a day or a boarding situation may be read as a ritual engaged in by children and their parents. *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] elaborates on steps of such a ritual in a chapter significantly titled “Despedida” [The Leave Taking]. In this chapter, Ernesto who had spent the previous two chapters traveling and living in close proximity with his father who works as an itinerant solicitor part ways when the latter accepts a job and chooses to leave his son behind in a boarding school in the small, rural town of Abancay in the mountains of Peru. This chapter highlights the separation of parent and child while later chapters detail Ernesto’s attempts to integrate himself into the school and its daily lives. The crucial liminal moments often occur in Ernesto’s lengthy trips away from the school during

which he reflects on his (in)ability to integrate with both the boys at his school and Abancay's community of Quechua speakers. As we will see in Chapter Three of this project, the bridge comes to represent the liminal space of between for Ernesto and it is obviously there that he grapples with these questions of belonging and integration. Additionally, and as we will see in the fourth chapter, we can also observe a much more contemporary display of these rites in the "Rites of Incorporation" that the young gang members complete in their joining the Mara salvatrucha gang in *Sin nombre* [Nameless].¹⁰

Developing the idea of Liminal Rites as van Gennep attempted to often involved a consideration of the two more stationary and, in a sense, stabilized rites. Separation rites, for example, mark distinct exclusions or terminations, such as "in funeral ceremonies", while incorporation on the other hand marks additions and inclusions, for example through marriage (van Gennep 11). Liminal rites tended to mark particular periods or moments of transition and as such often occupied a "reduplicated" position (11). Van Gennep illustrates this idea using an adolescent's passage into adulthood via marriage and in particular through a betrothal process. As he writes

A betrothal forms a liminal period between adolescence and marriage but the passage from adolescence to betrothal itself involves a special series of rites of separation, a transition, and an incorporation into the betrothed condition; and the passage from the transitional period, which is betrothal to marriage itself, is made through a series of rites of separation from the

¹⁰ These scenes will be dissected with this schema in mind in the fourth chapter.

former, followed by rites consisting of transition, and rites of incorporation into marriage” (11).

Envisioned as such, betrothal (the liminal “period” prior to marriage) emerges out of adolescence but even the process of becoming betrothed requires engagement with a complicated nexus of separation, incorporation, and transitional rites.¹¹ Gang initiations, for example, replicate this complex system of separation, incorporation, and transition. For example, and as we will examine to much greater depth in Chapter Four, in the film *Sin nombre* [Nameless] a young boy joins the infamous Mara Salvatrucha gang. He leaves his grandmother’s house to join the gang but faces a series of transitional steps such as the murdering of a rival from another gang prior to his full incorporation, which takes place as a ritual beating while the group counts to 13, a number important to the group.¹² Like these ceremonies of transition, Van Gennep notes that “the pattern of ceremonies comprising rites of pregnancy, delivery, and birth is equally involved” as are transitions from adolescence to betrothal (11). Yet he additionally cautions his reader that, even as his work expands the importance of rites of passage and their subcategorical functions, “all rites of birth, initiation, marriage, and the like” should not be considered as rites of passage because “all these ceremonies have their individual purposes” (11).

To clarify further the idea of liminality as present in van Gennep’s original conceptualization requires the examination of two key considerations. First, liminality, as

¹¹ Almost none of the characters we examine in this dissertation’s 10 focal texts and films leave adolescence behind by marrying into adulthood. The lengthening of adolescence in industrialized and post-industrialized settings explains in some part this change. Additionally, as we will see in Chapter 2, some traditional societies such as Sparta in Ancient Greece recognized lengthier periods between the beginning of puberty and marriage as adolescents in this period had a range of other social and/or educational obligations.

¹² Please see Chapter Four for more explicit consideration of the steps of these initiation process.

van Gennep originally conceptualized it, involved an explicitly spatial consideration, at first physically and then metaphorically relevant to the theory. In the book's second chapter, "The Territorial Passage", the writer describes particular sacred and/or social geographical spaces and the passages that lead to them. To elaborate on this spatial component, van Gennep considers how a range of sacred and secular spaces function as thresholds. The author juxtaposes the doors that lead to sacred spaces such as a synagogue or a temple with international borders and thus considers how these doors, borders, and thresholds exist as both passages to and/or between and other spaces but also as liminal spaces in their own right. As the author describes,

the door [which] is the boundary between the foreign and domestic worlds in the case of an ordinary dwelling, between the profane and sacred worlds in the case of a temple... [and so] to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a new world” (van Gennep 21).

It is of no small consequence that these spaces have also been coopted by state and religious institutions that seek to control everything from how these spaces are approached to who may utilize them. The writer thus asserts the importance of the spatial aspects of his theory that should not be glossed as they most certainly also communicate a temporal component that could very well become the more fixed, though temporary, phase elaborated upon by Turner. In the previous example from *Los ríos profundos* ‘[Deep Rivers]’ the Abancay bridge functions as a physical, spatial representation of the interstitial or liminal space that Ernesto occupies in his transition from child to adult, even more than his school or stay in Cuzco. It also potentially represents a shift from familial to communal belonging, even if, as we will see in Chapter Three, any semblance of full integration remains ever out of his reach. Van Gennep then suggests that Rites of Passage contains various sub-categorical rites, which he “propose[s] to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stages *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites* (21).”

The second key consideration for van Gennep’s theory involves a reevaluation of puberty rites, a theme the writer returns to regularly as one of many initiation rites that required a period of transition between one and another stage or phase. The importance of puberty to van Gennep’s work is trifold. First, through his examinations of puberty, the

anthropologist attempted to correct what he viewed as the “unacceptable general theories” that conflated the social initiation rites through which an individual would become fully integrated within his or her own society with puberty rites.¹³ By separating initiation rites from puberty rites, van Gennep attempts to elaborate further on the “tripartite diachronic structure” present in various cults and societies (Turner 14). Puberty gains a second level of importance in van Gennep’s analysis as a means of showing how particular physiological processes, did not necessarily coincide temporally with attendant social phenomena. As later research also showed, van Gennep demonstrated that

The physical puberty of girls is marked by a swelling of the breasts, and enlargement of the pelvis, the appearance of pubic hair, and above all the first menstrual flow. Therefore, it would seem simple to date the transition from childhood to adolescence from the first appearance of these signs.

But from a social standpoint this is not the case, for reasons that are primarily physiological. First, sexual enjoyment is not dependent on puberty, but may also be experienced earlier or later, depending on the individual; orgasm may even appear several years earlier, so that puberty is important only for the ability to conceive.” Second the menstrual bleeding does not occur at the same age among the various races, or among individuals within the same race. The variations are so great that

¹³ In particular, van Gennep critiques H. Schurtz’s 1902 work *Alterklassen und Mannerbunder* (Leipzig: G. Reiner) and Webster’s *Primitive Secret Societies* as the former “fails to provide an explanation either of the variations in the [social] institutions considered or the nature of the ceremonies which correspond to them” while Webster “construct[ed] a priori a hypothetical prototype of primitive age groups and secret societies, and he sees deviations and degenerations from it almost everywhere” (van Gennep 65).

one cannot conceive of any institution being founded on an element as undeterminable and as irregular as puberty (van Gennep 65-66).¹⁴

Given the many individual, embodied differences young men and women experience as they go through puberty, van Gennep asserts that the diversity of individual experiences exposes a disconnect between the so-called puberty rites and the event they commemorate: the onset of individual puberty.¹⁵ Through his delinking of physical and social puberty, van Gennep shows a distinct difference between the rite(s) as signifier of a sometimes less than obvious signified (the onset of physical puberty). Puberty, social and biological, then remains hugely important in all of our texts even if it is rarely mentioned or explicitly acknowledged. For the children, such as Cristina Peri Rossi's young children and the nameless "niña" [girl] who narrates Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], puberty represents a horizon that will, as Tristan Garcia describes it, serve to encapsulate the experiences of the moments narrated in the texts. Particularly given the difference between narrated time and the time of narration, we the reader can know that age and an attendant attainment of puberty have acted to separate the narrating character from the childish events. At the same time, while the majority of the texts dealing with teenagers do not explicitly deal with bodily changes for either the

¹⁴ Shortly after this passage, Van Gennep also examines the physical changes that mark male puberty and finds the signs to be "even more complicated" and permissive of ever greater "variability" (67). One major reason for this involves the fact that "the first emission of sperm may be preceded by emissions of mucus, [so that the onset of puberty] often passes unnoticed by the subject" (67).

¹⁵ Although rare, van Gennep noted that, in a few "rare instances", these two events coincide, particularly when girls are isolated, sometimes even considered dead and then resurrected" (van Gennep 67). None of the novels evidence such an explicit connection.

girls or boys they concern, the results of these changes are obviously found in the youths' search for romantic and sexual relationships and experiences.¹⁶

The British anthropologist Victor Turner took van Gennep's definition of liminality and placed it in the context of broader conversations on "the study of culture and society" (Turner 94). In the process of doing so, Turner demonstrated a strong knowledge of van Gennep's writings and the utility of the previous definition of liminality as a comprehensive model with applications to his own project. While Turner's intellectual endeavor was not explicitly the expansion of van Gennep's work, this ultimately resulted from the application of the concept to Turner's consideration of the relationship between community and *communitas*, the latter idea suggested by Turner as a means of distinguishing between the community as a "fixed", structured, and often hierarchical entity versus the idea of the *communitas* as a time and social space that eludes such specific structuration. While Turner gives several examples that I consider below, it is important to note that many novels regarding children and adolescents begin by presenting a picture of hierarchical society as found already in the home. Situations of incomplete or broken homes - circumstances such as those face Ernesto as a result of the death of his mother and Jorge Amado's orphaned "captains" in his *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] – often serve as warnings or examples of the destabilization (or unfixing) of a society.

To understand Turner's expansion of van Gennep's concepts as outlined above requires the situation of these claims within Turner's broader project: the critique of

¹⁶ Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* presents two characters, Oscar and his sister Lola, whose bodies change as a result of adolescence and other physical factors. This will be addressed in the fourth chapter.

“fixed” societies as being incomplete without the examination of *communitas* as formed in liminal moments.¹⁷ For Turner, even the slightest consideration of “liminal phenomena” or “liminal *personae* (threshold people)” involves scrutiny of the particular way in which they change the relationship between objects assumed to exist in mode of stasis, at least beyond these liminal moments.¹⁸ This moves the focus specifically beyond the ritual and to the participants itself. As Turner writes

¹⁷ Turner acknowledges a genealogical predecessor for his definition of *communitas* in the writings of Aristotle on government. He refers to Aristotle’s *Politics* and in particular the first part in which the philosopher examines the community [*communitas*] as the social base of the city. He writes “Since we see that every city is some sort of community, and that every community is constituted for the sake of some good (for everyone does everything for the sake of what is held to be good), it is clear that all communities aim at some good and that the community that is most authoritative of all and embraces all the others does so particularly, and aims at the most authoritative good of all. This is what is called the city or the political community (Aristotle 1:1 (p. 20)).”

Turner cites Aristotle’s idea of *communitas* in order to emphasize the social nature of the communal body and its presence as the prevalent if sometimes ignored social structure.

¹⁸ This will be reconsidered at length in the fourth chapter.

What is interesting about liminal phenomena for our present purposes is the blend they offer of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship. We are presented, in such rites, with a “moment in and out of time,” and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties. These ties are organized in terms of either caste, class, or rank hierarchies... (Turner 96).

The existence of these paradoxical elements subsequently uncovers, for the writer, “two major ‘models’ for human interrelatedness” (96). These irreducible, societal models emerge as “the first” suggests an image of “society as a structured, differentiated and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of “more” or “less”” (96). In contrast, the second model “is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated *comitatus*, community or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of ritual elders” (96). The latter model arising most “recognizably in the liminal period” (96).¹⁹

In Turner’s work, liminality provides more than a threshold to be crossed *en route* to other states of being but also a moment of significant if sometimes symbolic social

¹⁹ Turner does not differentiate between this *comitatus* and the *communitas*, suggesting that the terms are synonymous. Given his preferences for discussing *communitas*, I have used that term throughout this project.

potential. In the films *Sin nombre* [Nameless] and *Cidade de Deus* [City of God], the creation of a communal mentality permits each gang to survive if not thrive. Thus even if the symbolic rituals such as the ritual beating are not absolutely necessary, they function as a symbolic system that does not permit its own questioning.²⁰ Thus, as the former (“fixed”) social model divides people via a hierarchical social structure such as we find in both Rosario Castellanos’ *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] as well as in her later work *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations], the latter *communitas* model exposes the potential inherent in the communion of the lowly, the outside or the peripheral. The nature of the threshold and of the people residing within it are furthermore “necessarily ambiguous” (Turner 95). As Turner explains, this necessary ambiguity results

...since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony (95).

In passages such as the one immediately above, Turner emphasizes the potential for a *comitatus*, or a “community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (96) to emerge from societies with pronounced liminal periods. This potential is constantly checked if not entirely destroyed when the *liminal personae*, as Turner conceptualizes them, are returned to the scene their presence supposedly determines. This is, again, most clearly found in the films that

²⁰ Ernesto crosses these thresholds repeatedly in *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers]. These symbolic crossings represent the ambivalence and the lack of *communitas* available to him.

consider gangs but can also be seen to a less obvious degree in works such as Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] as the central generation gives shape (and name) to the novel even if they are laterally constituted in the context of a conservative social hierarchy that cannot permit individual deviation, even if such a deviation would permit a character to survive.

In all of the examples, literary and anthropological, if the liminal period retains great social potential it does so while systematically disempowering the occupants of this place. In Turner's examples, these *liminal personae* are first presented as "possessing nothing", at times stripped of their clothing, dressed as monsters, or given uniform clothing with their cohort in order to stress that they "have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank or role, position in a kinship system – in short, nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiates" (Turner 95). Minor versions of this process are found throughout literature, for example in the arrival of the 'new kid' who cannot immediately integrate into a social or school group. This is exactly the situation facing Cuéllar in "Los cachorros" as he is initially viewed as an outsider by his cohort.²¹ Turner describes the behavior of *liminal personae* as "normally passive or humble" noting that they "must obey their instructors implicitly" so far as to even "accept arbitrary punishment without complaint" (Turner 95).²² Having nothing and being submitted to treatment intended to extirpate any individuated responses thus suggests a

²¹ Interestingly, in many episodes including the one from "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] the demonstration of a talent (such as in sports) or presentation of a small object (such as a new toy) acts as a sort of talisman permitting entrance into a group. I do not think these minor possessions signify a major departure from the symbolic act of *communitas* formation but rather have the literature showing the formation of a *communitas* that recognizes similarity based on the presentation of similarity. Basically, these small toys or talents mirror to certain degrees the toys and talents already present in the group and thus cancel each other out so that by having the same or similar things and talents these children in fact have nothing.

²² This is recognizable as hazing or bullying in the United States context.

weakened populace. While certainly, “among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense comradeship and egalitarianism,” Turner’s optimistic view regarding the long term potential resulting from a shared liminal moment remains necessarily elusive as the very processes that bind liminal persons seek to do so by robbing them of any capacity to act as agents for either a shared or even an individual purpose. This is particularly evident in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as small groups form only to disintegrate a few pages later and in “Los cachorros” when the cohort cannot unify to support their castrated friend.

Victor Turner’s work works at a crossroad between situated between the anthropological application of the term and its expansion to the fields of literary and cultural studies. While my project corresponds more completely with the earlier applications of the idea from van Gennep and Turner, I have found the study of specific deviations to be fruitful and productive as these particular ruptures permit the elaboration of concepts such as a *liminal hermeneutic* and an incipient idea of *liminality as locus of enunciation*. The following pages will thus briefly examine two such deviations that assisted in my understanding of the concept.

Specific examples of liminality as used by the critics vary significantly in distinct areas of study but range, generally, from a consideration of rites and trauma in the earlier, literary studies from the 1980s and early 1990s to questions of space, boundaries, and the peripheral in later studies from about the mid 1990s to the present. Turner’s later work proves useful in engaging with this genealogical division in that he already rejected a connection to Freudian ideas about rituals. In a particularly prescient comment from the edited volume *Secular Rituals*, Turner critically observes that

In liminality, new ways of acting, new combinations of symbols, are tried out to be discarded or accepted. Ritual, and particularly liminality, should not be regarded as monolithic. A tribal ritual of any length and complexity is in fact an orchestration of many genres, styles, moods, atmospheres, tempi, and so on.... Merely to equate such ritual with the obsessional ‘rituals’ of Western neurotics, as Freud did, is to rob it of its creative potentials, and of its nuanced interplay of thought and mood (Turner “Variations” 40).

Still such a call for the cautious application of liminality to Freudian and Lacanian interpretation rightly predicted that the term would be of interest to critics’ revisionary attempts beyond the field of anthropology. As an example of these sorts of different uses, Homi Bhabha “reinterprets” the Freud’s idea of “the narcissism of minor differences” using liminality so that the “liminal point of [the] ideological displacement [that] is the turning of the differentiated spatial boundary, the ‘outside,’ into the authenticating ‘inward’ time of Tradition (Bhabha 213).

Gustavo Pérez Firmat’s literary analysis provides an illustrative example of the way a Freudian literary criticism has made use of liminality as a useful conceptual tool for approaching populations and characters existing at the margins of society. Here, even though the critic explicitly wanted to avoid “elaborate[ing] a theory of marginality (or liminality, the term [he] prefer[ed])” (Pérez Firmat xiii) in order to focus instead on the use of liminality as a hermeneutic tool, his work puts into practice an operational genealogy of liminality that enacted a particular “disparity”, to return to Foucault’s idea

about such genealogies, present in social criticism at the time: the conflation of marginality with liminality.²³ Gustav Pérez Firmat's *Literature and Liminality: Festive Readings in the Hispanic Tradition* employs such a hermeneutic in its analyses of exceptional phenomena that may lead to the creation of Turner's *communitatus* groups. Events such as carnival, *choteo*, and disease thus provide common events that Pérez Firmat examines through a liminal lens he constructs following a close, if brief, reading of van Gennep and Turner. Thus, even if Pérez Firmat never goes so far as to show how literary scenarios anticipate and sometimes problematize liminality his work remains important and exemplary in its initial use as a frame of approach and as it precisely and accurately incorporates the shift between van Gennep's work as primarily focused on a temporal process (visualized within the action crossing of a threshold) and Turner's "spatial" focus (xiii-xiv). As Pérez Firmat explains "while for van Gennep the limen is always a threshold, for Turner it can also be a place of habitation" (xiv). In my exploration of literary figures who occupy liminal spaces, I reconsider how both aspects of the common phenomenon function, at times jointly and at other times in concert, and how breakages, disjunctions and ruptures such as we find particularly concerning in the

²³ This dissertation occasionally concerns itself with characters existing on the margins or in the periphery of their societies as indigenous characters, women, and mestizo/a characters have long been relegated to these social spaces at the side or beyond projected cultural centers. As such a brief distinction between the sometimes-conflated terms is merited. To this end, liminality deals specifically with individuals who are at a threshold constructed with the presumption of a crossing. Liminality expresses a teleological trajectory towards a next phase that is an impossible aspect of many discussions regarding social margins. As an example of this, in her book, *Borderlands/La frontera: The New Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa engages directly with a life lived "on borders and in margins" as a difficult "territory to live in, [a] place of contradictions" (Anzaldúa 19). These contradictions, like those found in considerations of liminality, inspire ideas of a future that is radically different from the present. As Anzaldúa describes "there is an exhilaration in being a participant in the further evolution of humankind... [in acknowledging that] dormant areas of consciousness are being activated, awakened" during a life lived on margins of both United States and Mexican society (19). Unlike children or adolescents, marginalized communities, for better or worse, do not exist in a discursive space that assumes their transcendence but, at best, a spatial joining with the center.

fourth chapter reveal the flaws in the metaphors used to explain and therefore delimit the phenomenon of permanent liminality in the expansion of *communitas* groups and the suggestion of perpetual liminality as a possible *telos* under certain circumstances.²⁴

In general, Pérez Firmat's work aligns closely with Turner's spatial conceptualization. It bears noting, however, that the dichotomy he identifies as separating van Gennep from Turner is not necessarily an opposition so much as an expansion of the former's idea by the latter. Pérez Firmat's broader point exists not in this expansion, however, but in the significant acknowledgment that "the idea of structure may well presuppose some form of liminal relation", noting as evidence Jacque Derrida's well-known essay which "pointed out that the center-periphery dichotomy delimits the very concept of structure" (Pérez Firmat xiv). According to his reading of Derrida, Pérez Firmat argues that "intelligibility of a structure... depends on its being centered", a process necessarily requiring movement "between" center and periphery that itself acknowledges, the existence of a middle, or liminal, space (xiv). Derrida's understanding of play thus spatializes itself in Pérez Firmat's highly spatialized understanding of liminality. This, however, does not resemble the stakes for the *communitas* with which Turner concerns himself and which are represented as potentially destabilizing lateral moments that come to be coopted by institutions, as the literature throughout this project shows repeatedly.²⁵ I would thus argue that Pérez Firmat's liminal interlude represents a

²⁴ See Chapter 4.

²⁵ The most obvious examples come from Cristina Peri Rossi's *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion] and Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]. See Chapter Three.

clear, if creative, departure from the term's genealogy, at least as connected to Turner and van Gennep.²⁶

Critics in the 1980s and 1990s generally preferred to focus on liminality's spatial aspects; but this focus, though intellectually productive, often came at the expense of consideration for liminality's temporal aspect and the crucial consideration of the temporariness of this situation. A final example of a creative departure useful for our general consideration of liminality today then comes from Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*. In this text, the critic repeatedly uses the term with little definition and no contextualization. Thus, while Bhabha's own reading fleetingly acknowledges the importance of both the temporal and spatial aspects, his focus remains on the destabilizing potential of liminal spaces and therefore Bhabha focuses doggedly on the spatial elements of the term. For example, after calling on Renée Green's use of liminality as the "interrogatory, interstitial space between the act of representation... and the presence of community itself", a concept Green makes visual through the inclusion of stairwells in her work, Bhabha explains that "this interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (Bhabha 5). In fact, as Turner suggested and as I have found in my research, while immanent liminal groups certainly emerge they do so in ways that reflect the existence of external, hierarchical structures with which they must interact. As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, the social matrix within and against

²⁶ As one result of this difference, critics such as Gustavo Perez-Firmat who work with a Freudian psychoanalytic framework addressed the term's ambiguity in manners distinct from van Gennep and Turner. Pérez Firmat explains this dynamic in the term's "convertibility", an idea tied by Freudian psychoanalysis to sublimation, plasticity, and even regression. Pérez Firmat locates his use of the term in a Freudian approach to literary analysis yet avoids a careful definition. In context, nonetheless his work suggests convertibility as equivalent to adaptability or even definitional flexibility.

which liminal *personae* and *communitas* groups shape themselves always function within the context of a broader social matrix.

While I disagree with Bhabha's use of liminality for the creation of new hybridic cultural forms, I do think that Bhabha attempts on some levels to invoke the democratic or lateral potential of the idea as Turner had originally suggested. In considering his work, I thus maintain a space for this reading as he does in his introductory remarks in the critic's analysis of Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story* and in his particular consideration of Aila's participation in South Africa's apartheid society, which he uses to illustrate his idea of the speech act as creating a liminal space. He writes

The stillness that surrounds her, the gaps in her story, her hesitation and passion that speak between the self and its acts – these are moments where the private and public touch in contingency. They do not simply transform the content of political ideas; the very 'place' from which the political is spoken – the public sphere itself, becomes an experience which questions... what it means to speak from the 'centre of life'. (20-21)

Here we see, for the first time, the brief suggestion of liminal spaces as a locus of enunciation as Bhabha suggests that the speech act is capable of destabilizing social centers. The liminal site of enunciation acknowledged by young fictional characters provides a crucial consideration for this dissertation yet it also will show how the social matrix creates and contextualizes this space in order to control the outcomes. This is a particularly evident concern throughout Cristina Peri Rossi's short stories. Moreover, and among other problems, Bhabha's use of liminality here ignores temporality completely

and instead focuses on the spatial and social divisions and the interstitial space created between. It must be noted that such a gap is not necessarily liminal but rather epistemic and experiential in that they do not necessarily presume a crossing or a completion. In this way, Bhabha's liminality functions quite distinctly from its genealogical predecessors and much more closely to the, genealogically unbound, borderlands as found in Anzaldúa's work.²⁷ I mention this here so that my later argument for the consideration of certain *liminal personae*, such as Oscar Wao or *Sin nombre*'s [Nameless'] Casper, as attesting to a non-transcendent liminality that does not correspond with this discussion of hybridity.

More recently, Tristan Garcia in his 2010 book *Form and Object: A Treatise on Things*, returns to the consideration of liminality as both a spatial and temporal phenomenon. Garcia's treatise also returns this concept to the consideration of adolescence specifically as an age of importance to the critical analysis of contemporary culture. The philosopher approaches a chapter of his book that considers adolescence by borrowing heavily from the concepts provided by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner. His project expands significantly on the idea of liminality even if his prose rejects the established technical vocabulary for these ideas. One key innovation Garcia provides expands on Van Gennep's articulation of the difference between social and biological

²⁷ Bhabha, in fact, stretches liminality far beyond its original, temporal and spatial meanings when he writes that

It is not the colonialist Self or the colonized Other, but the disturbing distance in-between that constitutes the figure of colonial otherness – the white man's artifice inscribed on the black man's body. It is in relation to this impossible object that the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes emerges" (Bhabha 64).

Envisioned as such, liminality most certainly becomes a problem and one importantly characterized by the growing social (political, cultural, etc.) distance between social groups. This definition completely ignores the temporal distance and teleological thrust, or more simply put, the directional tendency implicit in the concept.

puberty. Garcia goes further to argue that “Puberty does not *determine* adolescence, nor does adolescence *define* puberty” (Garcia 390). In fact, in his estimation,

Puberty, or rather pubertal times are bodily events which express a living individual’s **continuous identity transformations**. Puberty is a constant becoming, accelerating and decelerating at certain times. **Adolescence, on the other hand, resembles ‘an age’, that is part of a life conceived as an object** (390, emphasis my own).

The recognition of an ‘age’ further “projects onto an individual’s life a series of divisions, of definite and divisible moments, which structure a lifetime as a sequence of objects contained in each other”, a processes Garcia likens to the Russian nesting dolls so that one exists within another, and so forth (390-391).²⁸ This concept and the metaphor of the doll then introduces the important ideas of personal continuity that permits for particular variations, namely of scale or sometimes of form. This idea of repetition emerges most clearly in Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] as the theme of repetition with minor variation ultimately destroys individual or even group agency to the extent that it never becomes entirely clear if the text’s principal speaking voice belongs to the group or resides outside of it.²⁹ Nonetheless, Garcia thus bypasses Turner’s spatial obsession and returns to van Gennep’s consideration of the way in which change may be

²⁸ This metaphor proves usefully illuminating as some versions of the toy would include identical yet scaled down versions housed in larger versions of themselves while others involve distinct entities that share the same general if resized shape but bearing a different face. Using this metaphor permits a useful engagement with entities of time as encapsulated in the completion of another age or era while the actual physical transformations remain up to the individual object upon which such transformations will leave their mark. This leaves unanswered but suggested the questions of whether the enclosed entities are the sameness or if they rather represent replications with variability across or between levels.

²⁹ See Chapter Three.

articulated in the emergence of an individual social unit. As Garcia formulates the question: how does one “articulate... [the] continuous and ceaseless temporal becoming [of] a body between birth and death, and the spatialized division of the social world, organized into domains and discrete objects distinct from one another” (396).³⁰ These becomings and their articulation of origins within and connections to local cultural practices provide central themes to not only the work of Cristina Peri Rossi’s rebellious children but many of this dissertation’s youths.

In his consideration of the “ages of life”, Garcia comments that “one [age] in particular captivates, since it seems to be at the centre of ages, the heart of life, the object in the very middle of becoming: adolescence” (Garcia 385). The theorist makes notice of the way that considerations of adolescence cannot be divorced from the current social moment. He writes that

³⁰ In his broader project, the Garcia attempts an intellectual exploration of the physical universe as comprised of objects that exist independently from the “human-world relation” (Garcia ii). Garcia’s writings thus situate themselves as part of the emerging “Speculative Realism movement” that has, since its inception in 2007, attempted to “defend the autonomy of the world from human access, but in a spirit of imaginative audacity” (ii). The purpose of this study involves recontextualizing human experience apart from the limits of human perception. Garcia does this by engaging with “things” that exist prior to conceptualization as precepts rather than concepts. Garcia does this through a consideration of “perspectivism” an idea he borrows from Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (see Viveiro de Castro “Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism.”)

Garcia’s discussion of adolescence comes in Book II, a point in his work when he moves from considering more abstract and universal “things” to an increasingly intimate space of human experience. The last chapter comes to consider death as that which makes particular paradoxical ideas of human age and life comprehensible (See “Critique of Crisis: Each Age’s Chance and Price” (pages 405-409) and also Chapter XVI “Death.”) For Garcia, “ages of life” are particular temporal objects arranged biologically and socially by humans and through the representative, artefactual processes he describes previously in his work. Garcia argues that the “‘Ages of life’ are the primary objects that an individuated life comprehends, itself comprehended in classes and in genders” (Garcia 385). Age consequently becomes the liminal category *par excellence* as it provides for life a means of internal self-understanding temporally contemporaneous with and spatially contingent to the other means of life’s external comprehension, particularly class and gender.

The contemporary attraction to adolescence is both narcissistic and voyeuristic. It is narcissistic because it concerns adolescents themselves in television series, comic books, films, popular music and all other artistic and non-artistic representations. It is voyeuristic because those who are not yet adolescents (who are called by a symptomatic extension ‘pre-adolescents’) and those who are no longer adolescents (adults) observe what they are not, separated from them by an invisible temporal line, with a mix of envy, contempt, and adoration (385).

This invisible, temporal line is most certainly the recognition of a particular liminal moment that is most thoughtfully and fully understood from outside of it: pre-adolescents to some extent and much more fully, adults. Adolescence itself is thus conceived of and presented as “a *double game*” (385). On the one hand this occurs increasingly as a result of a division in representative art into that which is produced “*for* adolescents... [versus that which is] *about* adolescents” (Garcia 385-386).³¹ Yet Garcia, Nancy Lesko and many others locate the source of “adolescence’s frustration and power, the conjoined feelings

³¹ Garcia engages primarily with “cinematic representations” and suggests that films for adolescents tend to be “comedy, horror, or melodrama, emotional initiations, banal humour subverting adult rules, and transformations of childhood’s beautiful images into mordant horror and gore” while filmic productions “*about* adolescents” display “the adventures of singular, obscure, elusive, or impossible characters” (Garcia 386). Film, television, and media critics such as Thomas Doherty have analyzed the “juvenilization” of American films since the 1950s, lamenting the fact that the commercialization of film (and more recently television programming) led the medium to “cater to one segment of the entertainment audience: teenagers” (Doherty 1). Such one-sided analysis ignores Hollywood’s contribution to the creation of the teenager via its recognition of the individual and financial autonomy that began to characterize adolescents in the United States during the Second World War (Green 244-245). During the 1940s and after the war, adolescents in the United States garnered an increased amount of social criticism and fear as adult society had to once again consider the potential delinquency of its youth (For a more complete consideration of delinquency and precocity please see Nancy Lesko’s *Act your Age! A Cultural Construction of Adolescence* (Routledge Falmer 2001)).

of absoluteness and degradation, of autonomy and dependence” as the result of a “compromise between a natural period and a cultural division of time” which further reflects “the very expression of a contradiction between nature and culture (Garcia 387).³² The literary representations of youth often work within this contradictory space and it is the selection and critique of the space that imbues these novels with a critical power inside their own literary traditions.

Here again the literature this dissertation considers often anticipates these questions and particularly the way social networks create a space for this “frustration” so that it may essentially be defused rather than leading to actual social change. By “writing off” adolescents’ critical observations, social matrices create an outlet for these feelings that ultimately permits these utterances or creations to become incorporated in the broader social setting. To this end, Chapter Three will deal with characters who participate in liminality with the telos of future, mature participation in their respective societies as critical voices. Thus, a small girl such as *Balún Canán*’s [The Nine Guardians’] narrator may grow beyond her book from being an observant witness to a writer capable of making present history’s victims. At the same time, in late capitalist systems not all *teloses* permit transcendence and we will see in the novels and films considered in the fourth chapter how an immanent, as opposed to transcendent, *telos* creates a new yet already figured and essentially powerless *communitas*.

Returning then to our theoretical considerations and the genealogy of liminality, Garcia’s work examines at depth the particular temporal and spatial challenge that other

³² See also Nancy Lesko *Act your Age!* Chapter 4 “Time Matters in Adolescence (pages 107-134) and Nancy Lesko “Denaturalizing Adolescence: The politics of contemporary representations.” *Youth and Society*, 28(2), 139-161.

theorists either gloss or wholly ignore. Moreover, he acknowledges the crucial importance of analyzing these elements within the context of contemporary, secular or increasingly secular societies. As he writes

...what characterises modern adolescence as a new age of life between the two [childhood and adulthood] is its lengthening. Adolescence was not an age, but an eventual limit. Adolescence thus went from being a *threshold* to being an *enclosure*. The time between childhood and adulthood became long, too long to merely be an event, an isolated ritual, because what separates childhood from adulthood became too important (education, workers' rights, sexual protection, legal minority) and too spread out (university scholarisation, creation of an adolescent culture). **Adolescence, which was an event, became an object.** It became autonomous, obtained a supposed "in-itself" which challenged thinking about ages of life – a moment between-the-two which exists by and for itself, against everything else, an authentic *adolescent within a state*. (397).

Garcia's analysis here describes the temporal expansion of the liminal zone, which resulted in no small part from the industrial and, subsequently, the technological revolutions' economic and social impact on youth and their society.³³ Given the distinct sociopolitical and economic situations facing the characters and contextualizing the texts considered by this dissertation, the truth and/or importance of this idea will be revisited in

³³ Garcia notes that this dynamic appears already in Immanuel Kant's *Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History* in which Kant examines the distance between what van Gennep later would call social and physical puberty. According to Kant nature has not altered the age of puberty to match the progressive refinement of society but sticks stubbornly to the law which it has imposed on the survival of the human race as an animal species. As a result, the effect of social customs on the end of nature –and vice versa – is inevitably prejudicial. For in the state of nature, a human being is already a man at an age when civilized man (who nevertheless still retains his character as natural man) is merely a youth, or even only a child; for we may well describe as a child someone who, in the civil state, is unable because of his age to support even himself, let alone others of his kind, despite having the urge and capacity to produce offspring as called upon by nature (Kant 228).

subsequent chapters and in relation to specific considerations attendant to the literature at hand. At the same time, these differences do anticipate Garcia's conclusion that, as the liminal phase expanded, it also becomes an object that, in turn challenged previously "stable" concepts, namely the constancy of ages and in particular the distinct, "unbridgeable" separation between child- and adulthood. This analysis leads Garcia back to the original challenge that motivated van Gennep and which led to the description of liminality in the first place: the consideration of societally contextualized responses to the separation of ages.³⁴

As all genealogies analyze moments of cohesion and difference, so this section of Chapter One has sought to illuminate both consistencies and disparities in the concept of liminality. One ongoing challenge for this project, for writers and theorists from van Gennep to Garcia who avoids using the term but whose work clearly explores the importance of liminality in human life, involves the term's adaptability which has been addressed briefly above. In short, particularly subsequent to the work done by Turner and van Gennep, later theorists demonstrate how the term's "convertibility" may result in its expansion to become "a kind of master trope that subsumes diverse phenomena" (Pérez Firmat xiv). This idea pushes liminality past a breaking point such as we saw previously in Bhabha's use of the term.

Far from such an expansion, however, contrasting marginality with liminality (see footnote 23 of this chapter) restores the concept as a useful, functional descriptor of temporary phases often viewed through spatial metaphor. Liminality, like marginality,

³⁴ Chapter Two of this dissertation problematizes the idea of this lengthening as being solely a post-industrial dynamic through engagement with praxes of youth found in Ancient Greece and colonial Lima (see Chapter 2).

results from historical processes further associated with the political processes through which knowledge and discourses come to be created and authorized as sites of intellectual power.³⁵ For example, the Spanish empire in its colonization of the American territories marginalized indigenous peoples, their knowledges and experiences, and the far reaching effects of this marginalization can still be found in the divided societies of *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] Chiapas, *Los ríos profundos*' [Deep Rivers'] Abancay, and more subtly in the other texts considered over the course of this project.

Liminal categories emerge from comparable colonizing processes; however, they function distinctly in order to create an intersection such that age, the central preoccupation of liminality, must be considered in connection to questions of race, gender, and sexuality, considerations situated in the field of marginality. "Contact zones" most certainly exist in both theories of liminality and marginality yet whereas liminality implies, generally, a temporary situation to be transcended, marginality functions as a site created by historical disparity and sustained by contemporary praxes. Therefore, *Oficio de tinieblas*' [The Book of Lamentations'] Idolina and *Los ríos profundos*' [Deep Rivers'] Ernesto may very well "age out" of their liminal existence and come to occupy places of social privilege based on solely on their belonging to privileged ethnic and linguistic classes while *Balún Canán*'s Nana can never overcome her marginalization unless a profound change comes to the social system that marginalizes her.

A Working Theory of Liminality

Following this genealogy of liminality, I suggest for use in this project a concept of liminality that simultaneously incorporates its temporal and spatial components. These

³⁵ See Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969).

can be considered illuminated through the use of dynamic spatial metaphors, for example “passing over a threshold” or “entering in to a house.” The temporality acts as the primary consideration therefore but its spatialization and integration into both individual and social bodies remain crucial pieces for our consideration. Additionally, liminal instances, including but not limited to adolescence, have long been presented as part of a *telos* leading both eventually and necessarily toward life stages understood (or imagined) to be more complete. Yet in the very recognition of liminality there has long existed a potential for lateral expansion, an immanent line of flight from the *telos* of the liminal to the peripheral. I will, in the following chapters, engage with these moves in the consideration of characters and social settings that elaborate upon both transcendental and lateral moves as connected to adolescence and social belonging. To that end, while traditionally passages have been marked by rite or ceremony, in industrialized and post-industrial contexts these ceremonies receive little formal position but rather become inscribed within the social matrices and require the active participation of family members as agents of rite and passage. Given this consideration and the fact that the literature considered has been written in the 20th and 21st centuries, the marking of these passages and the attendant rites of transition is less formal but still present. In the repetition of intimate, personal events such as leaving a child at school, an adolescent’s first romantic/sexual encounter, or a child’s first trip to the ice cream parlor, we see familiar and important praxes that retain social and familial import. In fact, all of these “rites” will be studied in the context of literature in the following chapters. Finally, incomplete families, such as those in Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] and Amado’s *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands], provide relatively

contemporary examples of how incomplete units function in the creation or rejection of processes that had, already, functionally excluded them.

Towards an Understanding of Liminal Subjectivity

While the basic theory above will be put into conversation with the literature considered in this dissertation, the inclusion of a few additional hermeneutical tools for our critical engagement with this literature is crucial. Therefore, along with the elaborated idea of liminality suggested above, a second essential theoretical consideration involves the interplay between the private, lived experience of the individual and the social context within which that occurs.

Each body we encounter represented in literature exists at the nexus of its own particular social matrix. For example, in *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], we know that a short, young girl narrates the novel and that her knowledge and understanding of the world and her place in it is at times bolstered and at others diminished by her parents' perspectives, her Nana's stories, and her brother's ascendant trajectory. The individual thus emerges as a subject of its matrix, its rules, norms, values, and projections.

Liminality must then be approached as similarly contextualized by the interplay of perspectives in which any central, "threshold" character –Idolina, the bed-bound girl in *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] or Mario Vargas Llosa's "cachorros" [cubs] – are both internally and socially constituted. This play of perspectives is not an innocuous one but rather functions to demonstrate how each individual functions as the subject of a discourse that at once precedes them but in which they too participate.

My recognition of liminal entities as crucially connected to their social matrix builds directly out of the literature and also from Michel Foucault's understanding of the

importance of the subject. To this end, the subsequent chapters' direct engagement with young subjects as triangulated by their families, the Church, and the State and as we have already begun to consider in this project's introductory analysis of Rosario Castellanos' *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] demonstrates how subjects emerge as the production of particular, distinct but often overlapping discourses. To that end, considering how Foucault elaborated upon "a history of different modes by which... human beings are made subjects" has proven most useful as his concepts and methods assist in the understanding of these complex dynamics (Foucault "The Subject" 208). Foucault himself turned to this project late in his work when, in the 1980s, the writer identified and expounded upon "three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects" (208). Not the least of these were those "modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences" and in particular he called out the fields of "*grammaire générale*" [general grammar], linguistics, and philology for the ways in which they come to inscribe the subject (208). The other two praxes the philosopher considered were the "dividing practices" that separate, for example the "mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy" and the "sexuality practices" which became, in Foucault's perspective, a means by which "a human being turns him- or herself into a subject" (208). As we will see clearly in Chapter Three and find echoes of in Chapter Four, for the children and adolescents of literature produced in Latin America and its diaspora, the major discourses include not principally those outlined by Foucault but rather by the dynamic, triangular interplay of the family, the State, and the Church.

Even as the institutions and discourses shift, Foucault's methodology still provides a useful hermeneutic in that it fundamentally explores how discursive power

itself is found dispersed throughout human praxes so that the individual must be approached via a consideration of their socially contextualized understandings and limitations. Thus, the differences between the discourses central to the literature that I study matter less than the central examination of power as found diffuse in social systems and structures. Moreover, Foucault describes the contemporary processes through which the subject comes to be constituted, writing of “creative” power as that which “incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids, absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon a subject” (Foucault “Subject” 220). Therefore, this system cannot emerge as one of only punishment and deterrents but also creates a scenario of rewards and incentives. As the literature shows, almost all of the young protagonists recognize and react to these “creative” systems. For one example, such a multifaceted practice of power presents itself insidiously in the introduction to the titular story of Peri Rossi’s *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children’s Rebellion] when even the free time of the young is put to work in the expression of the State’s aims. Additionally, In a particularly important moment to be analyzed at depth in the third chapter, José María Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] shows in a chapter entitled “Quebrada honda” [Deep Canyons] how punishments, rewards, and deterrents all provided the State, the Church, and also families, a set of tools with which to maintain the stability of the social hierarchy currently in place in the rural Peruvian setting.

The way in which literary characters react to the powerful systems they encounter is of significant importance to my project as I engage with liminal figures of youth often at the very moment that they begin to act independent of their parents but in contexts that,

as we will see, actively regulate personal liberty and individualism. Recognizing this as such begs the question of how agency function in the context of power-diffuse structures and their praxes of punishment and “enablement” (McHoul and Grace 7). Following the literature, I suggest that liminal figures and entities occupying social spaces of “flux” are enabled to a certain extent within this particular paradigm even if such ‘enablement’ will only serve to permit them an exploration of the borders that still delimit their potential. Foucault again proves useful in considering how the subject functions as both the object created by scientific and political discourses but also, simultaneously, as an agent capable, to some extent, of self-awareness, self-representation, and of transgression against the “various dominant scientific accounts” (93). Consequently, these characters may be limited, through definition and praxis, to particular preconfigured options for social mobility within the context of their own social matrix.³⁶ Examining this ability, as our later engagement with the literature will show, demonstrates the importance of both internality and external functioning of the individual subject.

Plurotopic Hermeneutics and Loci of Enunciation

Throughout this chapter, location and socio-historical context have been emphasized as crucial to the interpretation of the liminal subject as part of his, her, or their social matrix. One reason for this, that we will consider at depth in the project’s third chapter, involves the importance of the “horizon of expectations” against which we as readers understand a text and which also function for the characters so closely scrutinized by this dissertation

³⁶ See Foucault, M. *The History of Sexuality*; McHoul, A. and Grace, W. “Chapter 4 ‘The Subject’”, *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power, and the Subject*. 2nd edition. New York University Press, 1993; and, Dreyfus, H.L. and Rabinow, P. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. University of Chicago, 1982.

as the range of possible actions, ideas, and options.³⁷ These concepts will be further examined in specific connection with the literature to be analyzed in the following chapters. However, the interpretative tools to be employed as a means for this particular examination merit a moment of specific consideration as the texts themselves come from a range of national traditions and historical moments.

In forging a hermeneutic approach to a diverse range of characters who each function in distinct places and states of flux necessarily requires a set of conceptual tools acknowledging the existence of a range of interpretive possibilities and significances. How do we consider the perspectives of, for example, the young women that people Rosario Castellanos' *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] alongside the rough orphans of Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]? In considering such significant differences, Walter Mignolo suggests an idea of "plurotopic hermeneutics" as that which simultaneously invokes an enhanced and serious consideration of the "thinking subject's" agenda as colonial semiosis in this context almost immediately while also acknowledging that "the political, ideological, and disciplinary agenda of the understanding subject" may come into play in the subject's message and its choices for delivery (Mignolo "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse" 126).³⁸ Simply put, acknowledging a colonial semiosis "calls into question the

³⁷ As a brief introduction, we read characters such as *Oficio de tinieblas*' [The Book of Lamentations'] Idolina against a matrix informed by Spanish language and English novels in which young girls suffer physiological anguish with certain external causalities that are evident to us, the reader, but not necessarily to the world of the book. There is at once an internal (to the characters) and an external (to the reader) horizon of expectations to which we the readers and the characters relate. This will be addressed at length in the third chapter.

³⁸ Mignolo's argument is most clearly defined in this paragraph; however, it is somewhat frustrating that he speaks of agenda in the singular and not the plural as such a complex subject may clearly be in possession of a number of agendas rather than limiting itself to a singular project. The multiplicity of agendas remains a crucial consideration throughout the literary works to be considered.

positionality and homogeneity of the understanding subject” (Mignolo, *Darker Side*, 12). This individual, who was problematically both subject and speaker of and to the colonial discourse, thus emerges from the framework of a colonial semiosis as a more complex, dynamic, and active agent. Plurotopic hermeneutics provides a basis for a fuller (re)consideration of those individuals previously flattened or relegated to static and/or homogeneous subject positions within the ‘colonial discourse.’³⁹ Considered jointly, colonial semiosis and plurotopic hermeneutics suggest a complex interrelationship between imperial power and its colonial subjects as they necessarily demonstrate that the ‘colonial subject’ is and always was a conceptual fallacy composed within and by a discourse that erased or minimized all manner of difference and differentiation between the individuals making up the colonized society but also as occurring within an individual’s own experience and perspective. This process cannot be ignored in the creation of van Gennep’s “social rites” or Garcia’s “ages.” Literature permits an approach to these questions and considerations albeit one that takes the conceit of fiction as its basis.

Hermeneutic exploration of the “thinking subject’s” message requires a reexamination of textual agenda. In the consideration of literature that makes use of children’s and/or adolescent’s voices, the simplicity of the prose thus demands a careful consideration for how and why these claims to straightforwardness may and often do obscure a text’s or a subject’s subtler project.⁴⁰ Written or spoken communication, in this

³⁹ One key limitation still at play is the fact that these individuals most often are writers or artists whose works remain and can thus be considered. It stands to reason that in largely oral traditions, a variety of understanding subjects exist outside the limits of western literacy whose own accounts of these times were lost because of their non-alphabetic nature.

⁴⁰ The vast majority of the texts I consider are narrated at a time after the events considered. This speaks directly about how these texts function as discursive projects and demonstrates how the character telling the

context, is more than an ontological claim of or for existence but rather may be examined as nuanced and significant sophistic act which exercises its own explicit and implicit poetic acts that often relate in one way or another to the communicative, rhetorical and/or disciplinary specificities to which it relates (Kronfeld 317). In this case, whereas discourse is understood as aiming for a particular outcome and thus limits the agendas to definable, discursively situated and understandable norms, semiosis opens for a broader range of options and alternatives. The speaker is further removed from rhetorical restraints that consistently position him or her in opposition to the rhetorically-constituted imperial paradigm but rather appears as situated within a demonstrably complex grid in framed by both institutional and cultural requirements and motivations. This most certainly matters in our consideration of characters living during or just before the emergence of powerful dictatorships, such as the ones that forced Cristina Peri Rossi and Roberto Bolaño into exile. At the same time, we will see in the following sections how the Church and the Family already preconfigure and function as part of this grid delimiting development for the young characters under consideration.

In our approach to these young characters we will also examine how young people use their triangulated circumstances as particular spaces from which they may observe and comment upon their societies as well as the situations in which they find themselves. To this end as Additionally, another tool for inquiry involves semiotic act that the “thinking subject” performs in the selection and utilization of particular sites (or loci) of enunciation, the discursively situated places from which it is possible speak and

story, be it Balún Canán’s nameless girl or *Oscar Wao*’s Yunior, enacts a comparable project in which memory and narrative reconstruction must be questioned in order to understand how such the assumptions of simplicity and straightforwardness in fact obscure important textual considerations.

which also may impact the reception of the message. Foucault's theory demonstrates that while the speaker may possess a particular qualification for speech such as advanced knowledge, institutional certification or other legitimating factors, it is often his or her enunciation from a particular situation that claims additional legitimacy within discursive projects.⁴¹ As an example of how this works in one chapter of Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] the unnamed narrator finds a trove of family papers in her parents' study and runs to read them outside, hiding from her family behind a tree. She reads family secrets, an account full of horrors including the abuse of indigenous workers but also of powerful women who managed the family estates well, until her mother comes and snatches the documents away saying they belong to her brother and not her. In this example, the young girl speaks from two loci of enunciation: her father's study which she notes she had previously visited frequently and the obscurity of a not-so-secret hiding place. She considers family secrets but is almost immediately stripped of her access to this data when her mother wrenches them from her curious hands. This episode then shows how the site of enunciation impacts the reading of texts and also involves the situation of a reader's or a speaker's access to these "authorized" spaces and the knowledge they contain.

For both Foucault and Mignolo, examination of the sites of enunciation provides an invaluable means through which textual analysis may be performed critically while

⁴¹ Foucault takes for his example the 19th century doctor who may speak from the hospital, the clinic or private practice, the laboratory or the library (Foucault *Archaeology* 51). Each of these places operates according to certain rules and practices that inform the way in which one speaks from any given position. For example, Foucault demonstrates that while the hospital affords the speaker a "place of constant, coded, systematic observation, run by a differentiated and hierarchized medical staff, [it thus constituted] a quantifiable field of frequencies" and differed from other loci, such as the private practice "which offer[ed] a field of less systematic, less complete and far less numerous observations but which sometimes facilitates observations that are more far-reaching in their effects" (51).

demonstrating consistent attention to the context within which a text is produced. When a site is identified, it may be read in context with the norms, regulations, guidelines, practices and culture that surround it. Certainly, this is found in the above example from *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] yet given the importance of particular “standard” loci, such as the Church, the school, and the home, Foucault’s examples should briefly be reconsidered as they too speak of traditional places of discursive authority. To this end, as his example of the 19th century doctor demonstrates, it is important to identify both the spatial site of enunciation but also the demands that factor into the elaboration of such a site or onto the speaker within that site at the time in which a message is constructed. Thus, the 19th century, as Foucault often recalls, challenged doctors to keep up with rapidly changing technologies and understandings of the human body that constantly reconstituted the demands on such locations of speech and so engaging with a speaker who speaks from a lab or a hospital permits us to locate the knowledges with which this figure is most likely familiar (Foucault *Archaeology* 52). Even in fiction, mid- to late-19th century literature provides ample evidence to this fact: Dr. Bovary’s inability to keep up with advances in the medical field ultimately doom him to the provincial life Emma disdains while Sherlock Holmes’ integration of the laboratory and scientific progress into his processes of detection enable him to achieve an extremely high level of discursive authority rarely achieved by a fictional character. As these fictional examples subtly demonstrate, locating a speaker as part a specifically enunciated site or locus of enunciation provides analysts the means to access and consider contextualizing factors as related to the cultural milieu that produces them, a process that may call for an identification of the reader or analyst’s own position relative to the enunciated space and

more recent understandings of the rules, guidelines or cultural norms governing its operation. In the art exhibit in which Cristina Peri Rossi sets her story “La rebelión de los niños” [The Children’s’ Rebellion], these norms reveal themselves in a few brief but significant nods to the Church, the State, and Science.⁴²

Tone in the novels I consider is often a crucial aspect delicately stressed within the relationship a text shares with its reader. To this end, and in the consideration of loci of enunciation employed by young narrators, Mignolo and Foucault again prove useful in their consideration of how “point of application” or the object of the discursive exploration as well as its “instruments of verification” function as part of these semiotic schemes (Foucault *Archaeology* 51). This resituating and recontextualization of speaker relative to the subject of their observations and thoughts emphasizes both the perspective on the object to be considered but also the informed subject position from which one speaks. Thus, we as readers see and understand limitations for a very young narrator, such as the infant whose perspectives inform Peri Rossi’s “Ulva Lactua” while also acknowledging the appropriateness of these observations. The complexity in this approach is inherent because, as Foucault lucidly explains, “a whole group of relations is involved” (53). Here, Foucault’s work focuses primarily on the obligations for a specific speaker: how does he consider his various subject positions and balance them relative to the locus of enunciation from which he will speak? Semioticians often concern themselves with the intratextual construction of a narrative voice, Eco’s “occorrenz illocutiva” also known as the narrating I, and the context that informs their communicative act. The consequences of this consideration are significant as they relate

⁴² See the introduction to Chapter Three.

not merely to the construction of the object of discursive consideration but also in the identifying of the audience. Umberto Eco demonstrates that each text constructs for itself a “model reader”: someone who is understood to be capable of interpreting the “ensemble of codes” present in any given text or communication (Eco 7).⁴³ Besides sets of codes, this reader will understand levels of framing and style within a text (20-21). To this end, the model reader is implicitly invoked in the explicit mention and implicit markers delineating the site of enunciation. To return to Foucault’s example, while the doctor may speak from his private practice the tone of his text will position the ideal reader as also in a private practice or located elsewhere. Neither the text, speaker or the reader is necessarily intended to remain static or located within a specific position and thus a text may initially establish itself as emanating from a doctor working in his practice to a doctor working in a hospital. Therefore, while the ideal reader does not necessarily occupy the same subject position as the speaker it may be and frequently is understood as operating from or within a related or recognizable mode. Particularly in the serious scholarly consideration of youths in literature and narrated youth, this idea of location and recognizeability matters significantly as it often leads to a certain dismissiveness for narratives of youth that a closer reading such as the one I perform in the following chapters certainly complicates.

Conclusion

In the letter Cristina Peri Rossi addresses to her readers that we considered at the beginning of this chapter, the writer situates her work as part of a broader political conversation regarding the role of the State in the organization of social life that occurred

⁴³ I will reconsider this at greater depth in the third chapter.

not only in her home country of Uruguay but throughout Latin America over the 20th century. Her stories, which will be analyzed throughout this dissertation, then deal with both broad and far reaching discussions of power and the way the individual subject emerges within, through, and from these same narratives.

In essence, the early definitions and understanding of adolescence comes from a similar “localized” context that also expressed concerns regarding social relationships and individual behavior. Questions discursive power and the creation of agency are found explicitly present in the moment in which social and political projects came to define adolescence at the beginning of the 20th century in order to respond to particular social and political challenges present in Europe and the United States at the time. Illustrative of this collusion, in 1904, G. Stanley Hall published an elaborate two volume tome examining all aspects of adolescence. At least in the context of western academia, Stanley’s *Adolescence* provided a foundational and exhaustive text in the field of education and contributed significantly to the justification of classificatory systems that moved from single-classroom education to the age-graded classrooms ubiquitous today. The historical and political dynamics that led to this significant change rarely receive much attention; in her book *Act Your Age: A Cultural Construction of Adolescence*, Nancy Lesko addresses these changes as part of the “the racist and classist attitudes of the new experts of the late 1800s” (Lesko *Act* 141). Thus, in focusing on adolescents the perspective informed by centuries of imperial positivism began to turn toward the adolescent as a domestic threat to a society’s stability. Lesko shows in her thoughtful book how, through the definition and elaboration of these ideologically situated ideas regarding the adolescent, Foucault’s ideas regarding the “regulation of behavior and

knowledge construction” as elements of the modern state’s power apparatus turn against a society’s youth (142, and Foucault *Discipline and Punish*).⁴⁴

Reading figures of youth within and against the powerful discourses that construct them requires a serious and careful approach. In my following chapters, I engage with youth as liminal entities at once fixed by their social matrices, particularly through positive and negative interventions enacted by the family, Church, and State. At the same time, though cognizant of these limits, my project will show how youth retain the possibility for *communitas* that permits a lengthening of the liminal phase that particularly emerges when young characters a line of flight outward and across an emerging and immanent plane rather than transcendently towards maturity or adulthood.

As we shall see throughout our subsequent consideration of youth in literature, literary representations of characters crossing back or out past a threshold usually do so under some level of duress. Rosario Castellanos’ *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], as well as her later *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations], for example, both deal explicitly with passages by characters in and out of private and/or sacred spaces. In such cases, the limin represents a threshold that exists to be crossed while the consequences of crossings cannot necessarily be assimilated with positive results for any of the involved characters. For example, in *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] Matilde, who is not an adolescent but as an unmarried woman of childbearing years who retains an element of adolescence, chooses to cross into an unmarried man’s room. The problematic sexual

⁴⁴ Lesko goes so far as to warn that “continu[ing] to use their assumptions and conceptualizations, despite noble intentions, perpetuates [this] regime of truth”, the regime being the same racist, misogynist imperialism that permitted some of the 20th century’s greatest atrocities (141).

encounter that follows permits neither Matilde nor Ernesto a means of integrating their experience into the creation of a new family, his social status as a bastard conflicts with hers as legitimate orphaned daughter of a wealthy family while her somewhat older (and ill-defined) age conflicts with his emergence as a bachelor of prime marrying age.

Addressing complex scenarios such as the situation described just above requires a set of specific conceptual tools. In the following chapters, I will use my genealogy of liminality to engage with literary characters as liminal agents that occupy and speak from places within their own social matrices. In approaching liminal characters, Colonial semiosis, plurotopic hermeneutics and the locating of the site of enunciation provide a dynamic mechanism through which individual narratives and other accounts may be accessed, studied, and even compared. Because of the dynamic and complex relationship between these elements of inquiry and the objects of study, questions regarding readers and processes of reading are consistently highlighted. Just as the thinking subject is viewed as capable of enacting nuanced and sophisticated political agendas rhetorically, so his or her reader is constructed in a context that lends him or her additional depth, complexity, intelligence and capability of accessing, reading and decoding messages as intended. Just as speaker or writer is recentered to the core of his or her message, so such a reading based out of colonial semiosis also rescues the reader from peripheral exile and permits us a critical reengagement with the texts.

Chapter Two

Comparative Moments in the “Denaturalized” History of Adolescence

When her son Mario begins to show signs of the serious illness that eventually take his life, Zoraida Argüellos, mother to the nameless protagonist of Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], seeks out first the local priest, then a medical doctor, and finally a local man rumored to possess supernaturally-granted abilities to cure illness. The priest, vexed by Zoraida's paltry record of church attendance and service as well as her superstitious belief that the source of Mario's illness may be found in a curse placed on the family by the indigenous community they mistreated, begrudgingly offers to give Mario communion. The priest makes very clear his willingness to help Mario, as long as Zoraida “entiéndalo bien, no es por ustedes” Castellanos *Balún* 340) [“get this quite clear, it's not for you” (Castellanos *Nine* 234)]. Rather, he bellows at Zoraida

... tampoco es por ustedes por quienes yo me sacrifico. ¿Valdría la pena aguantar hambres en honor de un ranchero que conoce todas las argucias para no pagar los diezmos y primicias a la Iglesia? ¿Soportar el cansancio, el frío, en esos caminos que no llegan jamás a ninguna parte, por atender a un rebaño de mujeres indóciles, que no conocen ni cumplen sus obligaciones de católicas? ¿Consumirse luchando contra el terror de esta persecución inicua y sin sentido para que los hijos de esta masa de

perdición, sus muy queridos hijos, crezcan y sean iguales que los padres?
(Castellanos *Balún* 34).

And it isn't for you I make sacrifices. Would it be worth putting up with hunger just so as to honour a ranch-man who's up to every trick to avoid paying tithes and first-fruits to the church? To suffer weariness and cold on roads that never come to an end anywhere, simply in order to attend a bunch of rebellious women who don't even know how to do their duty as Catholics? To wear oneself out fighting against the terror of this iniquitous and senseless persecution just so that the children of this heap of perdition, the darling children, shall grow up to be exactly like their parents?
(Castellanos *Nine* 234).

In vocalizing his anger and extreme frustration, the priest reacts not only to Zoraida's documented lack of devotion but he also responds to the very fragmentation of society that continues to transpire. At the same time, this passage and its inclusion as part of Zoraida's systematic and desperate pursuit of a solution to her son's illness in fact speaks to the sustained and implicit social contract that guides life in Comitán, the rural southern Mexican city in which Castellanos' first novel takes place. Facing her son's illness, Zoraida does not immediately call for the doctor but for the priest, even though doing so requires a "humildad" [humility] that her character practices even if doing so frequently puts her in humiliating social situations such as this instance when the priest mercilessly condemns her in front of her only real friend.

While Zoraida seeks solutions to her son's illness in all possible local venues, her husband César also attempts to resolve the family's economic problems by seeking political assistance from various political seats in Chiapas. The family hacienda in the extremely remote village of Chactajal recently burned down most likely due to indigenous community's reaction against the family's cruelty and abuse. These chapters represent both parents pursuing distinct paths towards the safeguarding of the family's legacy and the fortification of its future which both parents locate in the physical survival of their son and the maintenance or reestablishment of the family's social status. Essentially, as parents and agents of their specific social matrix the Argüellos parents frantically pursue these objectives even if their options have shifted and their chance to impact the outcome in their favor remains elusive.

As their parents struggle against the changing social circumstances, the Argüellos children – Mario and his sister who the text never grants a name – begin to forge a relationship as they start attending communion classes together. While this relationship is cut short by Mario's death, the novel's narrator observes the chaos and death from her marginalized vantage point as the family's daughter whose life is constantly weighed as worth less than her brother's and her education as less than both the community's boys' and also the indigenous children. It is from this marginalized and liminal locus of observation that the narrator observes these changes while also understanding that the changes do not consider her so that her only, ultimate, option will be attempts at self-preservation and, as a result, in pursuing a sort of independent agency as the only option that this conflation of social changes permits her.

Introduction

Children and adolescents provide powerful symbols long used by writers, playwrights, artists, film makers, and, more recently, the mass media, in service to a range of ideological projects. Whether found in literature, film, or art, the presence of young characters permits their respective audiences a moment of familiarity and recognition. Particularly in the consideration of young children, such as *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] Domingo, *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians] Argüellos children, or the infant from the first story from Cristina Peri Rossi's *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion], this is because youth comes to be read against a horizon of expectations based on other texts and our own experiences that emphasizes a continuity between our literary and personal experiences of youth and the representations we find repeated *ad nauseum* in literature and film.¹ To this end, even as adult characters may depart significantly from our understanding or experiences, youth rarely do.

Although commonly found in literature and film, the dynamic just described represents a problem of both aesthetic and social import. The latter issues have recently been considered by Nancy Lesko in her research that theorizes youth within the discourses of education and, more broadly, among the social sciences. Lesko engages with this problem of familiarity as resulting from a concept of youth that "naturalizes" particular components regarding their lives and experiences and thus that emphasize "the seemingly timeless characteristics of adolescence" rather than stressing the "sociohistorical context of their creation" (Lesko "Denaturalizing" 139). As evidence

¹ I examine this "horizon of expectations" more closely as a literary consideration in this project's third chapter. For the moment, it is interesting to note that departures from such narratives have a profoundly unsettling impact on the reader particularly when they include violence perpetuated by the young. For example, the violence of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* or the 2006 Brazilian film *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] becomes compounded and thus leaves a deep, unsettling impression on the reader regarding these works.

supporting this claim, Lesko examines a range of documents from the mid- to late-19th and early 20th centuries that elaborate how, through the “participation of the sciences of anthropology, psychology, and child study”, adolescence came to be delimited in the service of “concerns within the United States for social order, virility, national and international expansion” (Lesko 139). Literature has concerned itself explicitly with this ideological collusion and often deploys young characters to expose the insidious underpinnings of such a collaboration. For example, as we begin to see in Zoraida’s desperate attempts to save her son, fictional texts recognize the position of youth at a nexus of scientific, religious, and political knowledges that permit them few instances of actual expression.

In her project of exposing such discursive collusions, Lesko’s prime examples come from *Adolescence*, the two tomes published in 1904 by G. Stanley Hall, considered to be a father of the field of educational psychology. Hall’s books, which at the time of their publication and for decades afterwards were considered to be the exhaustive manual for the study of all things relating to adolescents, includes a studies ranging from biological reports considering the way adolescent bodies change over the course of puberty to a study of literary representations of adolescents as read through an early Freudian lens.² While Hall’s intensive study of adolescence attempted to present an exhaustive study, read critically and with the distance of slightly more than a century we can see how the text’s incorporation of biological science, anthropological findings, and psychology, ultimately suggests a flattened image of youth as occurring naturally so that history and social context matter little relative to their discursive situation as subjects. In

² Early editions of G. Stanley Hall’s *Adolescence* are available at the Peabody Library and were consulted for early dissertation research.

resituating the early 20th century findings regarding adolescents as part of a particular moment and in connection to that moment's prevalent ideologies, Lesko follows Michel Foucault in her analysis of the dynamic and her revelation of its essentially political project.³ In my following chapter, I continue Lesko's project by examining how distinct societies, namely the Ancient Greeks and the Spanish colonists of Lima, Peru, defined childhood and adolescence and how these definitions resulted in praxes that further served the distinct ideologies found at those particular moments. In doing so, I am particularly interested in examining how the family, schools, religious institutions and state entities colluded in the delimitation of these ideas regarding youth as these institutions and the relationships between them will be of import to my own project.

Why Ancient Greece and Colonial Lima?

By examining praxes relating to youth in Ancient Greece and Colonial Lima, this chapter touches upon two major cultures that impact our understanding of youth in the literature that is central to this project. I have thus chosen to focus on two disparate and significantly different historical moments in order to engage with local praxes of youth that destabilize the idea of youth as "outside of historical time" (Lesko *Act* 129).⁴ The reasoning behind the choice is directly related to the literature I study. Firstly, Ancient

³ Moreover, and as we will see repeatedly when it comes to the construction of youth in literature and in history, such discursively situated projects serve primarily to elevate the authority of adults without challenging the discourses and methodologies that lead to particular results.

⁴ Lesko's claim here merits a moment of further consideration. She argues that ...the position of youth is multiply inferior. They are expected to measure up to finely tuned assessments of productivity, learning, morality, and achievement while remaining in a social position that is dependent and watched over not only by adults but also by their age-peers. Their dependence communicates their inequality, and their 'becoming' status appears to legitimate it. Being 14 or 16 is measured by peers and adults within a system where adolescents' position remains one of lack or absence. Adults are people who *are*, adolescents *will be* in the future. In these ways, adolescents, like the natives portrayed in ethnographic accounts, are imprisoned in their age as absence and suspended outside historical time (Lesko *Act* 129).

Greek culture and society comprises a bedrock of Western civilization. Secondly, the evolving beliefs and praxes of the Catholic church as enacted through the social and political process of the Spanish colonization function in all of the literature as explicitly and implicitly informing the social matrices and their guiding beliefs and values.

In choosing to study these two culture, it is absolutely not my contention to say these are the only or most important societies that partition off childhood and adolescence. However, as we shall see, the juxtaposition of these particular and distinct cultures demonstrates how distinct social praxes relating to the treatment of youth make comparable emphases on seven major issues of broad social importance.⁵ Through the consideration of these factors we will see how distinct societies recognized childhood and also how they partitioned off adolescence as a special yet “imprecise” life stage “between childhood and full maturity” (Golden). At its heart, this chapter interrogates how dissimilar groups managed the societal presence of children and adolescents, often treating them as a demographic group in response to comparable, if not entirely similar, social needs. In doing so, I follow Lesko’s writings that show how contemporary ideas regarding youth have emerged from distinct, disparate, and either unrelated, incomplete, or indirectly linked praxes and concepts that promote this idea of youth as a ‘natural’ as politically or societally expedient.⁶ Therefore a final objective for this consideration

⁵ Please note that particular definitions, such as childhood and adulthood, will be discussed at greater length in the ensuing sections in order that they may be understood within the context of respective local practices.

⁶ Again, although my project does not necessarily focus directly on the involvement of youth in these processes, it is generally obvious that young people are often active participants in this process. They may write, direct, create, and/or act politically yet their involvement in the construction of such conceptions of youth is generally marginalized because of their age and resultant lack of access to the means of artistic production and proliferation. Because of this, artistic representations or academic considerations of adolescence are almost entirely adult centric phenomena. As a result, even though such studies or artistic creations may consider the concerns and understandings of adolescent people quite carefully, the involvement of adult approaches and perspectives to the phenomena of adolescence remains central to any respective aesthetic or academic exercises.

involves the reevaluation of analytical tools resulting from a revisiting of moments that inform our horizon of expectations for youths but that have, perhaps, been lost temporarily to history or discursive isolation. By refocusing, as we will do shortly, on concepts such as the Greek idea of household ('oikos') or the use of Catechism for the ideological training of children as based on class and race, we will be able to understand the literary praxes examined in subsequent chapters as part of a broader tapestry of considerations.

The following chapter delinks youth from the assumption of their "natural" emergence by focusing on how childhood and youth have been (re)configured at specific times in response to social objectives or communal needs. In my literary and historical research, I have found four particular instances of institutional collusion that function to define youth in line with the social needs and ideological purposes recognized and, to an extent, shared by the state, religious institutions, schools, and families. Focusing on these four elements permits an evaluation of seven points of comparison which reveal how these societies elaborated upon youth at different times and in different social situations.⁷ These points for comparison include the way in which each setting 1.) established through social rites or practices and legal codes a liminal space circumscribed by child- and adulthood through;⁸ 2.) segregated the sexes through the distinct treatment of individuals by biological sex; 3.) included formal instruction including training in the arts (music, poetry, etc.); 4.) treated adolescent sexual behavior; 5.) required military and/or

⁷ Initial research also included considerations of Victorian England and Tawatinsuyu, the Inca empire. Findings from this earlier research will be included when useful to this dissertation's central project.

⁸ The distinct cultural definitions and/or praxes of all these terms will be examined in their respective sections below.

religious service; 6.) incorporated of adolescent physical, commercial, and/or religious labor; 7.) reacted to issues of individual ‘genius’ or extreme precocity.⁹ Focusing on these seven points reveals a series of common and differencing social responses that become observable when distinct and incompletely related groups are brought together within the gaze of comparison. Following this consideration, my chapter’s final section briefly examines the way in which youth and in particular adolescence came to be standardized through the scientific advances as connected to imperial projects of the 19th century. The final half of this dissertation will then be able to examine youth and adolescent literary characters as part of an enhanced perspective informed and contextualized by the concepts examined in the ensuing pages.¹⁰

Ancient Greece (800-146 BCE)

As we see throughout literature, the concept of family provides an entry point to engaging with characters and plots that is at once familiar but also often problematized. The historical examination of families demonstrates a similar tension between the familiar and the challenging. For example, as in many traditional societies, in ancient Greece the family functioned as “the basic social unit” upon which the rest of society functioned (Garland *Daily Life* 65). At the same time, Greek had no word for family but rather spoke of an “*oikos* (or *oikia*), which more accurately translates as ‘household’” (65). This idea extended in order to apply to every person “living under the same roof:

⁹ While ‘precocity’ is a somewhat anachronistic term, as we shall see in the following chapter, all societies found ways of dealing with individuals who excelled or surpassed socially circumscribed normative behaviors. To this end, the idea of genius provides a similar challenge as it too can be located to a specific context and should not be applied to less individually focused social settings, namely the Inca empire of Tawatinsuyu.

¹⁰ As a final note regarding methodology, my initial focus on Ancient Greece follows in Michel Foucault’s trajectory of examining conceivable possibilities for youth as concept and praxes. In this way, we can approach contemporary representations youth as a conceptual collective from diverse, non-dialectical points of origin that, in turn, suggest an array of possible options for their interpretation.

the master and mistress, their children and other dependents, and all their household slaves” but also included conceptual room for other entities including the “landed estate, the movable property, the livestock and any domesticated animals or pets” (65). The



Image III

“oldest male... was in charge of the religious practices” that were conducted within the household and while other tasks were clearly delineated to all the other household members so that the hierarchical value system maintained the patriarch’s power over his *oikos* (Garland 65).¹¹ Membership in an *oikos* could be considered a somewhat temporary state, at least for the servants and any daughters whose marriage

and union with her husband’s *oikos* would ostensibly dissolve her standing as a member of her biological family’s household (Patterson 100). For men however, a man belonged to two ostensible *oikoi*: that of his immediate descendants and that of his parents or grandparents (100).¹² Adoption, which will be studied to a greater extent below, also permitted a person some level of motility between *oikoi*. The vase in Image III (left) represents an extended *oikos* with a young mother handing a lively young toddler to a nursemaid while her young husband watches (“Hydria”).¹³ Labor divisions and family

¹¹ For a critical consideration of patriarchal values in ancient Greece, see Chapter 1 of Cynthia B. Patterson’s book *The Family in Greek History from Alexander to Cleopatra*.

¹² If this argument is followed, then the latter *oikos* is established primarily through the death of the patriarch and as a result it functions similarly to Inca ideas of familial structure prior to the death of a patriarch.

¹³ According to the gallery text,

It was the main duty of a Greek man to defend his city and of a Greek woman to bear children. This water jar presents a picture-perfect family: a young mother, a lively baby boy being handed to a nursemaid, and a youthful husband. A loom signals the accomplishments of the mistress of the house. The scene’s calm mood is typical for the High Classical period of the mid-fifth century BCE and prevails on grave reliefs showing similar family groups. In fact, a hole pierced in the vessel’s base renders it useless to the living and suitable for a tomb (Harvard “Hydria”).

organizations generally resemble the situation of Colonial Lima, in that, as we will see below, all members fulfilled prescribed roles that fell along generally prescribed guidelines. This role based organization remains evident, as we have seen in novels such as *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] and *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations].

To examine the liminal roles and responsibilities of adolescents in ancient Greece, it is necessary to focus first on the family as understood here as the fundamental building block for Greek society. Like the Greek state, the family also enacted a hierarchical structure. Within this tiered structure, the *Genos* provided the next rung and comprised familial connections that could be “traced... from a common ancestor, who, in many cases, was mythical or divine” (Garland *Daily Life* 66). Membership in the *genê* was exclusively limited to the aristocratic families and as Robert Garland notes only about 60 existed in Athens (65-66). Despite their somewhat limited size, these families “because of their wealth and power, effectively controlled the political process” (66).¹⁴ At the same time and functioning on a similar level was the *Phratry*, which is somewhat less defined but which included “looser” blood ties. Membership in one of Athens’ 30 Phratries “was the basis of Athenian citizenship” and each baby boy was admitted via a vote “of all the members of the phratry” with a vote signifying the phratry’s acknowledgment that the boy was “the offspring of an Athenian woman who was married” (Garland 66).¹⁵ The Greeks thus operated a ritualistic system for determining legitimacy and belonging. One

¹⁴ The power of the *genê* was limited through the “reforms of the Kleisthenes” at the end of the sixth century B.C.E.” (Garland 66). For more information on the importance of the patriarchy within the context of the Greek family or *oikos* see also Patterson, C. *The Family in Greek History from Alexander to Cleopatra*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.).

¹⁵ A second vote “acknowledge[ing a boy’s] legitimacy” was taken when a boy reached the age of 16 and “was accompanied by a ritual cutting of the candidate’s hair, an action that marked the end of his growing years” (Garland 66). These rituals of belonging were essential parts of Greek practices of citizenship.

of the major problems that is still explicitly found in contemporary 20th century novels such as *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] involves the way legitimacy becomes encoded and retains social import yet without definition or processes for full integration. This creates social imbalances that exist even within families so that characters such as *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] Ernesto Argüellos or even Zoraida Argüellos constantly navigate their social spheres without ever finding ways to "belong."

Citizenship

Belonging in Greek society involves a consideration specifically of citizenship. The structures that framed Greek life as described above permitted some social mobility within one's primary categories as defined by one's social status relative to either the *oikos* or the *polis* at large. A central and much studied idea of citizenship fundamentally structures these practices and it is crucial to remember that Greek citizenship was a heavily exclusive rite. Aristotle famously defined a citizen as "he who holds the office of journeyman and assemblyman" (Aristotle *Politics* 1275a) yet in practice this idea of citizenship was extended to all who could potentially hold this office: a practice limited to "free, adult men" (Patterson "Citizenship, Athenian" 146-147). Pericles' works further elaborate on the idea such that "whoever is not born of two citizens [*astoi*] should not have a share in...the polis" (Aristotle *Athenaion Politeia* 26.4). Birth and belonging thus linked this permits an elaboration of exclusive hierarchical situations such as we find throughout literature as well.

At any rate, Greek citizenship and full political participation in the *polis* could only be granted to "freeborn adult males over the age of either 18 or 21" in the majority

of Greek communities (Garland *Daily Life* 68).¹⁶ Moreover, while earlier in Greek history if one's father had been a citizen then a son could also claim citizenship in either 451 or 450 B.C.E. Athenian laws further restricted citizenship requiring an Athenian citizen to have both a father who was an Athenian citizen and a mother who was also Athenian as opposed to a "metic (i.e. resident alien)" although, as, Robert Garland remarks, proving the legal status of women could be incredibly difficult as they were never able to be considered citizens (68). Cynthia Patterson points to a linguistic shift from Aristotle to Greek practice as key to understanding the differentiation between female stakeholderhood and male citizenship, Patterson draws attention to the difference between Aristotle's use of the word *politai* and Pericles' understanding of *astoi*. While both words are frequently translated as referring to citizens and community belonging, in fact men could be both *politai* and *astoi* while women could only belong to the latter category. Patterson suggests that *astoi* refers to the "important nonpolitical aspects of citizenship" and could thus that the *astoi* be considered "shareholders" rather than acting political agents. In returning to literature, these concepts help us consider liminal characters such as Ernesto Argüellos or the boys from Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] as growing up to become stakeholders even if their out-of-wedlock births or

¹⁶ Tawatinsuyu lacked this general idea of citizenship but does enact a social contract that required the empire to meet its subjects' physical needs, namely of food, in the manipulation of its extensive networks so that starvation was virtually unknown. In exchange, local communities called *ayllus* owed virtually all their labor and large portions of a locality's agricultural produce to the broader empire. The system in colonial Lima followed, as we will see below, a similarly hierarchical structure, while leaving the individual family and local communities (*ayllus* and *mestizos*) to sustain themselves based on their own agricultural productions. Additionally, while technically adults by legal measures, this boundary between adult and adolescent becomes increasingly blurred both in all contexts. Modern international law almost universally establishes 18 as the age of legal majority. At the same time, in national contexts individuals under that age may often be tried in criminal cases as adults. Additionally, biological findings of the previous decades have demonstrated how brain development continues rather consistently between the onset of puberty and the attainment of about 24 years of age for women and 25 for men.

unknown origins would never have permitted them to rise above their backgrounds as ‘bastards’ or unknown entities.

Citizenship, whether referring to the social participation of the *astoi* or *politai*, must be considered in context of the other frames of belonging that were previously delineated. However, though all of these forms of belonging are crucial in contextualizing the social structure of ancient Greece, they ultimately functioned very differently for men and women. In addition, social participation, particularly in the public worship of deities, further demonstrates how men and women often participated, sometimes in single sex environments and sometimes together, but in ways that always depended on the clear differentiation of the sexes and their roles. This most certainly can still be found as evidenced in the gendered education and social participation of youth in the literature I study.

Adolescence and Belonging in Greek Society

The previous examination of the *Oikos* and citizenship considerations speaks of a society that ordered itself around the roles of individuals. In that consideration, childhood and adolescence represented demonstrated periods of life in which the *oikos*, schools, and religious entities colluded to prepare young people for the lives and roles permitted them by the details of their birth and sex. In considering youth, according to Mark Golden, both the “Greeks and [the] Romans recognized adolescence” yet their understanding of it was “imprecise in its vocabulary and chronological range” (Golden). Generally speaking, adolescence was conceptualized as beginning somewhere between the onsets of “physiological puberty (generally set around fourteen)” and up until a young person married and praxes relating to adolescence varied primarily based on gender but also on

“social class” (Golden) and could also be understood in contrast to childhood, which Plato and “many other Greek thinkers... defined... as the savage time of human life” (Vidal-Naquet 141). The understanding and cultivation of Greek and Roman young people concerned their respective societies and philosophers, historians, and medics including Aristotle, Plutarch and the “Hippocratic medical corpus” all focused attention at some points on the development of young people. This is not to say that age was not noted or not important; in fact, the Greeks recognized several distinct age categories in and through which an individual developed.¹⁷ Rather, this demonstrates that much like in literary works such as *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] or *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], age functioned as part of a categorizing system.

In this system, as for most of Western history, biological sex acted as a primary determiner of social roles in Ancient Greece, with little overlap in the responsibilities of males and females.¹⁸ Attitudes differed over time and it is crucial to note that Ancient Greece in our understanding functions as a definition for a number of changing and evolving local practices in the distinct city-states. Descriptions of the distinctions between Athens and Sparta therefore serve to illustrate the most distinct of practices and so most examples below will be taken from these two cities in order to demonstrate a multiplicity of practices as found in Greece between the years of 800 and 140 BCE. An additional consideration of note prior to engaging with practices of adolescent being involves considering how the Greeks in general understood the differentiation between male and female. Aristotle illustrates the idea that “woman is as it were an impotent male,

¹⁷ For a more complete depiction, see Chapter 2 “Athenian Definitions of Children and Childhood, and the Iconography of Age” of Lesley A. Beaumont’s *Childhood in Ancient Athens*.

¹⁸ This is not necessarily always the case. In Tawatinsuyu and the Pan Andean context, for example, it was not sex but ability that determined a community member’s assigned role.

for it is through a certain incapacity that female is female, being incapable of concocting the nutriment in its last stage into semen” (Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 728a 17-21). Beaumont mentions numerous literary and visual studies that equate childhood, and boyhood in particular, with adult womanhood. Such studies consider, for example, emotive boys in the same manner as women so that “boys as well as girls were feminized and thus separated from the world of men” (Beaumont 16). Her work underscores the idea that while biological sex ultimately determined the possibilities of a Greek individual’s life, “gender was not fixed immutably at birth, but rather developed and shifted as the years passed” (16). Adolescence, or the phase of life just past childhood, for which the Greeks had, as we will see, a number of names and practices, then emerges as a crucial time when normative social demands regarding the distinct comportment of young men and young women stabilized a gender dichotomy and began to solidify the distinct roles of men and women.

Male Adolescents in Ancient Greece

Young men married several years later than young women in Ancient Greece. According to Mark Golden, “male adolescents [known as] *ko(u)roi*, *meirakia*, *neaniskoi*, [in Greek, and as] *adulescentes*, *iuvenes* [in Latin] were likely to marry by their mid-twenties, by thirty at the outside” (Golden). The lengthier liminal period between childhood and adolescence involved personal education and professional training, with distinctions granted based on the social status and therefore the social and political potential of the individual. During this period, young men participated in the *ephebia*, according to Aristotle this was a sort of “civic military service” that endured for two years and prepared him for admission into fuller society (Vidal-Naquet 142-143). Pierre Vidal-

Naquet writes that “the time between childhood and adulthood, which is the time of war and political life, becomes a period of trial and initiation” in Greek society, a period he compares to similar initiation rites in “primitive” societies (6).¹⁹ While many young men participated in the ephebic training, it remains “unclear whether all citizens participated” (Friend “Ephebe” 77-78). This quasi-universal subscription finds comparison with the similar status of young men in Tawantinsuyu as potential warriors. Much like in Ancient Greece, Inca policy towards conscription remains a bit uncertain, moreover and as we will see, given the diversity of the Andean populaces subjugated to Inca rule, it is highly unlikely all young men would make efficient or fully functional soldiers. While ideas of mandatory conscription tended to fade over time, a large number of male adolescents participated as soldiers in the European conquest of the Americas and military schools still provide possible educational options for male students under the age of 18 around the world today. One of Mario Vargas Llosa’s most important novels, *La ciudad y los perros* [The Time of the Hero] takes place in one such military school, the Colegio Militar Leonicio Prado.

¹⁹ Throughout his book *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, Vidal-Naquet frequently attempts to show how ancient Greek society operated similarly to the “savage” societies existing outside of first Greece and then Europe. He invokes a long-standing debate between the Jesuit writers Joseph Francois Lafitau and José de Acosta whose respective books *Moeurs des sauvages américains comparées aux mœurs des premiers temps* (Lafitau 1724, first published in 1974) and *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* (Acosta 1590, first published in 1604). According to Vidal-Naquet, Lafitau followed Thucydides in arguing for similarities between “the distant past of the Greeks” and “the world of the savages” and even surpassing his Greek counterpart by equating “Classical Greece” with these “savage societies” (130). Vidal-Naquet sides with Lafitau against José de Acosta for whom “the Greco-Roman world remained the civilization” (130). This superficially laudable position fails due to the author’s lack of deeper knowledge regarding the “savage” societies he attempts to extol at various points of his study. Additionally, given that the idea of an external “savage” or “barbaric” other existed for Greek society, Vidal-Naquet’s frequent use of the word “savage” remains deeply confusing as to its referent. The scholar sometimes uses this phrase in keeping with the Greek idea of non-Greeks as belonging to the *anthropos* while at others, such as in his invocation of Acosta, to the indigenous populations “discovered” by European conquerors starting in the late 15th century.

Initially, the Greeks understood the ephebic preparations as a liminal time, an important waypoint on a young man's journey to becoming something other than a low-level civil servant.²⁰ According to Aristotle, "During these two years of garrison duty, [the Ephebes] wear a *chalmys*, and they are free from all financial impositions; they cannot be involved in a lawsuit, either as plaintiff or as defendant, so that they will have no excuse for absenting themselves."²¹ The only exceptions are cases concerned with an inheritance or with an heiress; or when a man has to take up a priesthood hereditary in his family" (Aristo *Ath. Pol.* 42.5 as cited in Vidal-Naquet 143). As both Aristotle and Vidal-Naquet suggest, participation in the Ephebic period acted as a period of social exception: young men remained connected and visually present in society yet they simultaneously occupied an exceptional space that relieved them of certain social responsibilities.²² These processes clearly evoke Victor Turner's idea of the *communitas* as a communal entity formed during adolescence when a group formation emerges sometimes at the expense of individual identity. This will be discussed at length in the fourth chapter.

Ephebic preparations varied over time and, while initially focused on the development of a trained military force, ultimately a marked "decline in annual enrollment" led to particular changes in the training regime (Friend 78). First, the program evolved from a two-year mandatory training to a one-year voluntary obligation (78). Additionally, the enrollment decline impacted the troop's battle-preparedness and so

²⁰ The "Ephebia", according to Vidal-Naquet, underwent a significant change prior to Aristotle. According to Vidal-Naquet, "the earliest ephebia" existed in the context of the phratry,

²¹ The *chalmys* provides a key aspect to Aristotle's argument that ephebes were integral and integrated members of society. This outfit, according to Vidal-Naquet, was "understood not to be the dress of ritual seclusion", that is the outfits utilized by monks or initiates, but "to be like the military uniform[s]" worn by those living today and therefore as marking belonging and connection, rather than social isolation.

²² Interestingly, "at least in the third century BC the ephebes... were involved in the [Semnai Thai] cult", a group organized to worship the "Eumenides, or Furies, also [known as] the Anonymous goddesses, those without names, a collective group of deities with no individual personalities" (Dillon 94).

“they ceased to be a significant military force” and instead focused on other socially-important activities: “atten[ding] philosophical lectures, play[ing] a prominent role in state festivals, celebrat[ing] the glorious history of Athens, and receiv[ing] lessons in statecraft by sitting in on the assembly” (78). As Friend writes, the program’s initial success was also used as a model for later, “similar systems of youth education, centered on the gymnasium” (78).²³ This Gymnasium system certainly remains in western society today and the boarding schools found throughout literature permit students an opportunity to study in a similar environment.

Because Greek cultural life put great pressure on the “physical and moral development” of citizens, training was provided to develop each potential citizen’s “body, mind, and morals” through a course of education that included three categories: the “gymnastic” or physical education, “music”, and “reading and writing” (Gulick 79).²⁴ Greek physical education consequently included “systematic lessons in wrestling..., boxing..., running..., the broad jump..., throwing the discus..., and casting the spear” (80). Despite the latently martial nature of the common physical activities, writers including Xenophon and Xenias the Arcadian often describe both informal and formal displays and competitions of physical prowess as exuberant rather than bellicose. Additionally, formal displays of athletic prowess comprised significant parts of major religious festivals including the yearly festival honoring the god Hermes and in the national games including the Olympic games, but also the “Pythian, Nemean, and

²³ For more information, see N. Kennl’s *Ephebeia: A Register of Greek Cities with Citizen Training Systems in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Hildersheim, Germany: Weidmann, 2006) and P. Vidal-Naquet’s *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World* (A. Szegedy-Maszak, trans. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

²⁴ Gulick notes that the latter two categories, music and reading and writing, were sometimes collectively referred to using the term music.

Isthmian” tournaments (82).²⁵ Besides the occasional festivals, quotidian life for men and particularly for the aristocracy involved spending time at the *Gymnasia*, sites “originally frequented for athletic training and physical display” but that ultimately became site for “the education of citizen youth” (Brown “Gymnasium – Social History” 367).



Image IV

Finally, letters, or reading and writing, comprised the third area in which young men gained an education (See Image IV, left).²⁶ Education in this area ranged significantly based on both social class and individual potential. While most young men of the lower social rungs learned little more than basic reading/deciphering skills, those with a higher capability were permitted more advanced studies. Literary

studies included the reading of Homer’s *Iliad* and his *Odyssey*, as well as prominent writings by “Hesiod, Aesop, and the moralists, like Theognis and Solon” while particular passages relating to the moral development of the individual were “learned by heart, so that their influence on the character and on the whole attitude of the Greek toward life was strong and persistent” (Gulick 86). Athenians were noted in particular for their memories and the ability of many Athenians to “recite the whole *Iliad* and *Odyssey*” (86).

Physical training and humanistic learning have certainly shifted over time as priorities for the education of youth. At the same time and as Nancy Lesko shows throughout her work, in elaborating schemes that prepared and made games of physical

²⁵ Sports comprised a key component of a young person’s education throughout Ancient Greece and has been studied at depth. Along with Charles Burton Gulick’s classic text, *The Life of the Ancient Greeks with Special Reference to Athens* (1902), more recent works include Mark Golden’s *Sport and Society in Ancient Greece* (1998) and Stephen G. Miller’s *Ancient Greek Athletics* (2004).

²⁶ Attributed to The Harrow Painter. Red-figure Column Krater: Youth Playing a Lyre. Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Bequest of Joseph C. Hoppin. Retrieved from <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/collections/object/291116?position=33>

training permitted groups such as the Boy Scouts to continue training youth for military purposes even as schools took on more of an academic role. Read together we see these training and preparation programs still evident in the schools elaborated upon in the novels of José María Arguedas and Mario Vargas Llosa who at times show their young boy characters “playing” war and writing romantic verses. Scenes of this collective, male youth can be found throughout Latin American and Latino/a/x literature and beyond. At the same time, particularly in the films and novels I study, girls almost emerge from texts as part of collective voiced entities. One reason for this is found in the way western education segregated males and females particularly in adolescence but, sometimes, before.

Female Adolescents in Ancient Greece

Stephanie Lynn Budin, in her book the *Intimate Lives of the Ancient Greeks*, writes that “For girls, adolescence was all about sexuality” and in particular the onset of menarche between the ages of 12 and 14 (13). In Ancient Greece, female youth was equated largely and indivisibly to their sexuality which, in turn, was treated as a problem to be resolved before it led to unmanageable consequences. The Greeks generally favored early marriage for a number of reasons, including particularly for medical reasons. Budin notes that

Medical writers even claimed that it was imperative to marry off a girl as soon as her menses began, as the vagina had to be opened for the blood to escape. If the girl were left “constricted” for too long, she could suffer a number of nasty physical consequences, ranging from what in modern times we would call severe depression to suicidal insanity. The Hippocratic

medical corpus had an essay on the “Illnesses Affecting Maidens,” wherein the author claimed that virgins who have not been “opened” cannot readily expel menstrual blood from their bodies. The blood then settles around the heart (the ancient Greek center of thought), causing madness (Budin 13).

Doctors recommended “marriage and penile intercourse” as a remedy for these young women’s troubles (in Budin 13). Female adolescence, and in particular the onset of menarche and the resulting hormonal changes in the young women’s bodies, thus represented a personal and social vulnerability.²⁷ As such, young women were married



Image V

off early throughout Greece although an interesting exception occurred in Sparta, “where girls were not wed until age 18” (Budin 13). Budin cites Plutarch who wrote about young Spartan women participating in the same athletic and physical activities as young

men so that the girls “accustomed [themselves] no less

than the boys to march in parade and dance in religious rites and to sing in the nude” even in the presence of young men (Plutarch *Lyc. 14:2* as cited in Budin 13). The result of this equal treatment involved “freeing [maidens] from all softness and effeminacy and a sedentary nature” ((Plutarch *Lyc. 14:2* as cited in Budin 13). In terms of adolescence, the distinct practices in Sparta led to a longer period of female adolescence relative to the rest of the Greek world. Young women in Sparta spent this period of their lives pursuing physical fitness and thus were not subjects to the same concerns regarding madness that

²⁷ Image IV represents a young girl with a mirror. Source: Penn Museum. “Italic Low-Footed Red Figure Bowl with High Handles.” *The Ancient Greek World*. https://www.penn.museum/sites/Greek_World/x_goddesses.html

plagued other cities, including most critically Athens (Budin 13).²⁸ Moreover, even though Spartan girls would marry at 18, considerably later than their Athenian counterparts, the intervening years were comprised of a variety of activities other than the single mission of finding of a spouse. Pomeroy theorizes that one potential cause for the delayed marriages of Spartan women can potentially be located in this same emphasis on physical fitness. She notes that the strict regimen of physical training ascribed to Spartan women could have potentially delayed the onset of puberty, a dynamic similar to the contemporary situation “observed in young female gymnasts preparing for the Olympics nowadays” (Pomeroy *Spartan* 54).²⁹ Crucially, this delay between the onset of biological (and social) puberty with its reproductive possibilities and the marriage or other marking of social ‘maturity’ (aka, the arrival of adulthood) accounts for female adolescence. The literature and films examined throughout this project make no explicit and little implicit mention of the physical changes attendant to either young girls’ or boys’ commencement of biological puberty. Although several of the texts nod towards the physical changes of young bodies, social puberty is far more frequently found theme of Latin American literature. Idolina Cifuentes from Castellanos’ *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] and Lola and Belicia Cabral from Junot Diaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* experience the most dramatic changes as biological puberty significantly alters their bodies in ways that they must come to terms with socially as well as personally. The contexts of these changes will be discussed in the following chapter.

²⁸ See also Sarah B. Pomeroy’s *Spartan Women*. Oxford University Press, 2002.

²⁹ See also Anger, N. “Chemical Tied to Fat Control Could Help Trigger Puberty” *New York Times*: Jan 7 1997, sec. C pp. 1, 3).

As female adolescence could principally be “remedied” through marriage in Ancient Greece, many families sought to make matches for their daughters prior to the girls’ attainment of biological or social puberty. The responsibility of finding a spouse in the Greek city-states generally fell to a young person’s parents. The undertakings involved in this activity differed significantly by a person’s class. Royal families in Greece, like the imperial situations of Tawantinsuyu and the Spanish imperial courts, generally sought “dynastic” marriages for their children, and in this way preserved the ruling power via marriage, as they would continue to throughout European history (Budin 13-15). Among the lower classes, families generally found marriages within the family’s local network. In fact, the upper classes spent the most time and “considerable efforts to get a good match for their daughters” and, in the process, to gain “profitable family allies” (13). In Sparta, marriages differed significantly from this as “secret marriages”, sexual encounters carried on outside the observance of parental or societal figures that enabled young people to act in their own behalf when choosing a spouse (Pomeroy *Spartan* 41-42). In fact, these “marriages” would only generally be acknowledged after a young woman became pregnant, at which time the “consenting males” (a girl’s father and intended spouse) would make arrangements assigning the paternity to the girl’s “secret husband” (41). Such processes highlighted a great deal of social flexibility to the extent that paternity could be ascribed to another male entirely, should such a plan be deemed beneficial to the girl’s family (41).³⁰ In this way, Greek society regularly provided options for girls not dissimilar to the “creative” option Catalina creates for Marcela in

³⁰ This practice invokes the generally favorable attitudes Greeks held towards adoption. Families, particularly those with resources, could be rearranged through legal maneuvers that changed the inheritors of estates or provided children to barren couples as legitimized heirs. Even illegitimate children could be legitimized and receive social acceptance based on these legal processes.

Oficio de tinieblas [The Book of Lamentations] and that is absent for *Balún Canán*'s Matilde and that thus leads her to desperate suicide attempts.

Even if marriage provided a “rite of initiation” through which a young woman could find social stability, Budin argues that Greek society saw young women as less than adults prior to “parturition” or the act of giving birth (Budin 16). She notes that young Greek women proceeded from child or *dekatê* to *parthenos*, a phase wherein she was “a nubile virgin technically capable of but not socially recognized as being a mother, to ‘*nymphê* or bride’ ... and finally a *gynê*, or woman, once she had her first child” (16). Budin points out that “the ancient Greeks used the same word for both ‘woman’ and ‘wife’, showing that it was pretty much unthinkable for a female to be one without the other” (16). The writer further councils that “the idea of ‘adult female’ was somewhat relative anyway” given that “women were perpetually seen as legal minors who had to be under the authority of a male guardian at all times, usually her father and then her husband” (16). This complex minority clearly resonates with Castellanos’ writings as she often elaborates upon women who almost completely depend on men or the patriarchal system for their economic and social survival. Single or independent women, Cesar’s cousins in *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] and Leonardo’s mistress in *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] are not only judged by other women but also almost always end their narrative trajectories in even more socially and economically precarious positions than those from which they started. For example, Matilde begins the novel as humbly dependent on her two sisters but ends it by running away into the woods while her eldest sister Francisca devolves from being a harsh but competent hacienda proprietress to a state in which she locks her doors, paints her house entirely black, and

seems to find a new role as a female mystical leader to the indigenous peoples she previously abused.

Ideas of protection and authority as located in male patriarchs can be found throughout Latin American history and literature as well as in Greek society. Generally speaking, Greek society almost always connected female sexuality to marriage and thus maintained both marriage and heterosexuality as normative states. Fathers traditionally oversaw the “protection” of his offspring and according to Greek law could exercise his “authority, or *kratos*” and was thusly permitted to “enslave his daughter if he caught her in an act of illicit sexual intercourse” (Garland 97). Yet certainly sex beyond marriage and sex outside of heterosexual coupling existed. One of the most famous exceptions involving the life and “lyrics of Sappho, the Archaic poetess” from whose work emerged term “Lesbian” (84). Lida Roberts Brandt notes that the poetess’ life and works had been viewed for most of history as exemplifying a deep moral and sexual depravity until scholarship began a process of historical reexamination that began in the early 19th century (Roberts Brandt 49).³¹

For Roberts Brandt and other scholars since the 19th century Sappho, the so-called “tenth Muse” (284) provides a vivid example of a life lived adjacent to but at the same time outside of the social norms in Ancient Greece. While as Brandt writes “too little of her poetry is left to reconstruct with certainty the details of her life” that which does remain provides insight into the details of an acute intelligence whose peripheral experiences give voice to the other “missing” women of the time, women such as “Corinna, Myrtis, Praxilla, Telesilla, [and] Erinna [who] live in memory and tradition,

³¹ See also Welker, F.G.. *Sappho von einem herrschenden Vorurtheil befreiert* (Gottingen, 1816).

but not in their own work” (Roberts Brandt 45). For Sappho, life in Aeolic Lesbos “permitted greater freedom to its women than did... most Greek lands” as it acted as an “intellectual centre” drawing women from around the Greek territories as students (45). Fragments of poetry and statues exist to the other female poets and philosophers, yet little remains to describe the day-to-day life of women in Lesbos. Sappho represents the emergence of an individual figure despite general limitations. She is not unlike more modern figures, therefore, such as Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz who similarly found a locus of enunciation within a religious order that permitted a particularly dazzling intelligence to emerge. In fact, particularly given the limited educational opportunities available for females throughout history, religious service can be seen as an option that permitted and encouraged, to an extent, this individual development. At the same time, by couching such options in the structure of the patriarchal church, this certainly included significant limitations. This dynamic of permitting and encouraging individual precocity as a means of limiting its impact is found throughout literature and is particularly important to the study of adolescence. As we will see in the introduction to this project’s third chapter, an insidious undercurrent exists in contemporary authoritarian regimes that function with the same system of enticements and rewards as a means of control.

Considered more broadly, Sappho’s existence also speaks of a class of women and girls whose participation in religious life required their exclusions from the standard trajectory of maturing through matrimony and childbirth through either short-term or permanent commitment to religious service. Women participated regularly in worship activities that “focused on reproduction and the health of the family” (Cole 95). Cole writes that women “worshipped in the context of the family, for the sake of the family, or

with the goal of reproducing the family” (98). Outside of the home, women celebrated festivals such as the Thesmophoria, which honored the goddesses Demeter and Persephone, in order to “invok[e] [the goddesses’] goodwill for the fertility of the field and of women’s bodies” (Dillon *The Ancient Greeks* 83). Dillon explains that such celebrations were far from unusual and that “throughout the Greek world there were various festivals which were for women only, and from which men were excluded” (Dillon 109). The exclusion of men from this rite provided a compelling fodder for the public imagination and one myth relating to the event suggested that “Battos, [the] king of Cyrene (in modern Libya, [was] castrated by the women celebrants... because he intruded on the secret part of the rites... against the wishes of the women priests” (Dillon *Girls and Women* 110). Aristophanes’ famous play *Thesmophoriazousai* takes place against the background of this important festival. In the play, a male character, Mnesilochos enters the festival dressed as a woman but whose presence is communicated to the celebrants by “effeminate” male servant; both men are commanded to leave and, as Dillon writes, the play “reveals next to nothing about the rites” as even their description was considered illegal (110, 110-120). This play then like the rumor mentioned above ultimately serves to protect the secret rites and to strengthen the festival as a moment reserved exclusively for women.

In general, even though they were required to maintain religious observations, women maintained a gendered and “asymmetrical” set of religious responsibilities relative to their male counterparts (Cole 98); moreover, women retained the more tedious responsibilities of maintaining a family’s “good relationships with the gods of fertility, [that were] so important for agriculture, animal husbandry, and the family” (Lyons 35, as

cited in Clark “To Kneel” 8).³² Young women also participated in more visible ways prior to their marriages through occasional and highly symbolic participation in religious rites. “It was a great honor for a young woman to be chosen to bear baskets in the festival processions and to grind grain for ritual cakes and wave robes for dedication to deities in the sacrifices” writes Yiqun Zhou (203).³³ Additionally, women of “good birth” could perform in both festival choruses and choral contests that “gave women rare public opportunities to claim their fair share in the renowned agonistic culture of the Greeks” (203). Religious participation thus provides an exceptional opportunity “allowing women to put aside their quotidian domestic duties and... [to] win public recognition for their own beauty and talents under the aegis of the gods” (203-204). Yet it must be remembered that because the Greeks saw “women’s status as polluted” their participation always remained limited (Clark 9). One level of limitation involved the general separation of rites by sex so that men and women celebrated in distinct spaces and manners (Bruit Zaidman 338-376). Women did participate in specific, universally attended events including the “Panathenaea procession, the great festivals of Dionysus, [and] the procession of the Eleusinian Mysteries” yet even in these experiences, attended by both men and women, women participated distinctly. For example, “Women were

³² The ‘asymmetrical’ nature of such responsibilities consistently reemerges not as a ‘natural’ necessity but as a practical response to the social and familial obligations required by life from Ancient Greece to Tawatinsuyu.

³³ These roles were in fact highly selective with an Assembly choosing “from a list of well-born girls (*eugeneis*) between the ages of seven and eleven... four arrephoroi, or sacred casket bearers” (Bruit Zaidman 341). The “archon-king” then selected two young women to “take part in the weaving of the *peplos* that was given to Athena each year during the Panathenaea” while “the other two, ‘who live near the temple of the Polia... [would] spend time with the goddess in a certain way’, attend the festival of the Arrephoria, during which they take part in a peculiar nighttime ritual: in sealed caskets perched on their heads they [would] carry objects they [were] forbidden to look at” Bruit Zaidman 341 and Pausanias as quoted in Bruit Zaidman). Bearing and exchanging mysterious ritual objects then placed young women at the very center of cabalist acts while requiring their ultimate unawareness of the acts’ and objects’ forms and therefore these same objects symbolic and/or ritualistic meanings.

excluded from blood sacrifice and the subsequent division of the meat of the sacrificed animal”, acts central to the Greek understanding of an “accord between gods and men... the foundation on which political life was based” (Bruit Zaidman 338). Religious rites thus offered women venues for social participation while further supporting the gendered division of men and women in Greek life.³⁴

Women in Latin American literature are vital to the perpetuation of rituals. However, and as we have already seen in the introduction to this chapter, the repetition of tradition does not necessarily ensure that participants will adhere to the central beliefs or maintain a belief in particular rites’ sacred nature. In fact, Castellanos demonstrates women such as Catalina and Francisca as emerging to lead women and men in dark and violent rituals such as the crucifixion of Domingo and the commencement of a cult in *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] and *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], respectively. The idea of women emerging to take places of leadership thus appears as a terrifying option in both of these works.

The Greeks in Summation

As we have seen, the “upbringing” of a boys and girls as children in Greek and in Roman society focused largely on preparing the individual for participation in society according

³⁴ As in many ancient, western societies, Greek women’s bodies were considered inherently unclean, as both “polluted” due to their existence as humans with the capacity for menstruation (Clark 9), and as “polluting” as the potential for the “contamination” of men could not be contained (Llewellyn-Jones, 262 as cited in Clark 9). Greek scholars locate the fundamental reason for this in the Greek belief in the direct connection of a woman’s mouth to her genitals via “hollow tubes” that ran through their bodies; however they also locate a more abstract understanding of the “danger” of a woman’s gaze in its capability to “loosen[] [men’s] knees” in a manner akin to death (Homer as cited in Clark 9). For more information, see Clark, Christina A. ‘To Kneel or Not to Kneel: Gendered Nonverbal Behavior in Greek Ritual.’ Ed. Susan Calef and Ronald A. Simkins. *Women, Gender, and Religion* Supplement Series 5.1 (2009): 6–20. Print. *Journal of Religion & Society* 11; and, Bruit Zaidman, Louise. ‘Pandora’s Daughters and Rituals in Grecian Cities.’ *A History of Women in the West, Volume I: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints (History of Women in the West)*. Ed. Pauline Schmitt Pantel. 3rd ed. Cambridge, Ma: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1994. 338–377.

to whatever particular potential the social position of his or her parents allowed. While single-parent homes were far from uncommon, mostly parents shared responsibilities, but the particular dispersal of duties varied by parent. Mothers were “the primary figure[s] in a child’s growing years” but “authority, or *kratos*, was invested in the father or legal guardian” (Garland 97). This system seems to have granted a great deal of “cohesion” to both the Greek and Roman family systems but “delinquency”, especially among the young was not entirely uncommon and legal cases point to fights among young men over prostitutes and young women sold into slavery by their fathers as punishments for “illicit sexual intercourse” (97, 97-98). Additionally, the legal status of a young person as residing in a particular *oikos* could change if a person were orphaned following the death of a parent or if a young person was adopted into another *oikos*, a practice that happened frequently in both ancient Greece and in Rome. This model of family, while somewhat distinct from modern ideas, resonates with the creative solutions found throughout literature to the problems of legitimacy and social survival.

Practices surrounding the treatment of young men differed greatly from those connected to young women. Young men were initially prepared for matriculation into the *ephebery* and ultimately permitted to rejoin society as fully participating citizens while young women were often married off early for reasons the Greeks understood as relating to the health of a young woman. In summary, the Greeks generally saw nascent female sexuality as a potential problem or vulnerability. Spartan marriages for men and women tended to occur later in life because young people retained distinct social responsibilities outside of marriage. Sparta and Lesbos provide two examples of well-known and well-reputed locales that permitted a somewhat more flexible participation on the part of

women in keeping with the local as opposed to broader idea of values. The cure for this was marriage and, in fact, Greeks understood a limited female adulthood as necessarily connected to marriage and to childbirth. Women could maintain some individual or autonomous activity through participation in Greek religious life prior to their marriage and sporadically in connection to various festivals later in life. By means of contrast men and particularly the most affluent were the only ones capable of becoming citizens, a term which remains somewhat ambiguous throughout ancient Greece society. Men's belonging to certain social castes and categories was defined in various ways but once a young man was admitted via the two-vote system he received many benefits and held many responsibilities, not the least of which being his education in the physical arts, music, and letters. For men, inclusion thus always remained a possibility even if inclusion signified different things depending on a person's social potential. Ultimately, this system does, however suggest communal options for men while women tended to be isolated, a common tendency for women as we find in literature as well.

Colonial Lima (1542-1821)

Although separated by millennia, Colonial Lima and Ancient Greece retain a number of comparable cultural praxes relating to the social treatment of youth. In the pages that follow, I examine Catholic concepts of youth that accompanied the Spanish conquest and colonization particularly of Peru. At the same time, it is important to note that youth and age also comes into play in the chronicling of the conquest as many, but not all, conquest narratives were composed by older men who had participated in the conquest in their adolescence (teenage years) and early adulthood. An outlier here includes the work of Pedro de Cieza de Leon whose two books *Crónica del Perú* [The Chronicle of Peru] and

La florida del Inca, were composed primarily during his 20s and contemporaneous to his time in the Americas. Additionally, the timing of the European conquest of the Americas coincides, perhaps not entirely insignificantly, with the time in that gave birth to modern concepts of childhood in the west. “In medieval society”, writes Philippe Ariès in his seminal book *Centuries of Childhood* “the idea of childhood did not exist” (128). Ariès’ comment points clearly to a conceptualization of childhood that emerged as a set of practices connected to the onset of modernity, a particularly European phenomenon located by scholars as emanating from the mid- to late 15th century in Europe’s Catholic centers in Italy, France, and (sometimes) in Spain. Ideas regarding childhood and adolescence had changed so noticeably that by the 16th and 17th centuries, in Europe as well as the Spanish American colonies, there was a general sense that childhood retained “a particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, [and] even the young adult” (Ariès 28). In this spectrum of praxes, the Spanish Church and Spanish law both functioned together in the elaboration of youth.³⁵ Unlike Ancient Greece, in the context of early modernity childhood, adolescence, and adulthood thus emerged as multivalent,

³⁵ Specifically, and, “in keeping with the Roman legal traditions from which the Spanish inherited many of their legal practices,” Spanish law “established the age of legal majority at twenty-five (Premo 22). Legal minority granted the young some rights and protections under the auspices of the Spanish colonial courts. The courts ensured rights such as that guaranteeing that a child of seven years could “become engaged to marry” while “at ten, children could leave wills, and at ten and a half they could be tried for crimes,” even if they could only be “sentenced as adults for criminal offenses at eighteen” (Premo 22). An additional, crucial right, involved the “right to the assistance of a legal protector (*curator ad litem*)... [a] role [that] would be taken up by either a *procurador* (legal expert for hire) or an *abogado* (court-recognized attorney)” (Premo “Minor Offenses” 117). All youths under the age of twenty-five were provided this right even as they were assumed to retain graded levels of culpability for crimes.³⁵ Children under the age of ten, for example, were assumed to lack “moral understanding and... malice” for crimes while those between the “ages of ten and a half and seventeen... were believed to enter a new stage of criminal responsibility,” one in which youths were assumed to retain a nascent but advancing sense of “discretion” (Premo “Minor Offenses” 118).³⁵ This meant that judges were admonished to consider not only the social status of children but also the particularities of their circumstances in their sentencing (118). In theory at least, these practices would allow a judge to sentence a twelve-year-old differently from a sixteen or seventeen-year-old even if their crimes were the same.

conceptual categories from this time onwards and almost always connected to a set of hierarchical political praxes that related closely to European imperial projects. In particular, as Ariès argues, by this time the idea that “the infant who was too fragile as yet to take part in the life of adults simply ‘did not count’” was understood as entirely false laughably antiquated by the 17th and 18th centuries due in no small part to the Catholic church’s fascination with children and childhood as a locus for instruction around the world at this time it remained present and locatable in the works of writers as varied as Molière and Baltasar Gracián (128-132).

To examine the continuities and disruptions in European conceptualizations of youth, including concepts of both childhood and adolescence, thus necessitates an admittedly brief exploration of these concepts as understood within the Catholic episteme as practiced at that time. The following sections will briefly examine the more standardized ideas, beliefs, and practices found within quotidian Spanish colonial life along with the more exceptional but occasionally useful findings of the American inquisitorial courts. The purpose then of the study is to examine how questions of youth figured into the discursive strategies of social stratification that ultimately served to strengthen both the Catholic ecclesiastical and the Spanish political power structures at work in the colonies.³⁶

³⁶ It is outside the scope of this dissertation to demonstrate fully the problematic but important continuity which links “colonizing” practices relating to the firm subjugation of both the children of the Iberian colonists and adult and child indigenous people. It is important, however, to acknowledge that Spanish imperial policy treated los “yndos” [indians] formally as children, that is as legally, economically, and, as we will see, morally dependent upon the patronizing imperial Spanish power. Thus, the colonizing processes that Walter Mignolo so frequently elucidates certainly connect to the conceptualization of young people as particular subjects for paternalistic observation, monitoring, and control and the extension of these practices to the indigenous communities. In many ways, as we shall later see, the Victorian “elevation” of the child ultimately permitted British adults an unprecedented involvement in, and more importantly, control over, the development of its youth not dissimilar to the ecclesiastical goals found at work in Spain under the Inquisition.

In the process of engaging with Spanish colonial understandings of *menores* [minors], a multivalent term fraught with sometimes contrasting legal and ecclesiastical importance, it is crucial to note the provenance of texts concerning youth and society. In general, the origin of our historical understanding is found in: 1.) legal texts that concerned the legal status of children and were thus concerned with questions of “casta” [caste] origin and social “legitimacy” much more frequently than they were concerned with age; 2.) religious texts including, importantly, spiritual biographies that depicted the religious, moral, and intellectual development of the devout, and 3.) fictional picaresque novellas, will be examined in a later section of this chapter.^{37;38}

The Spiritual Status of Youth in the Colonial Setting

Just as the Spanish conquest of the Americas cannot be understood without acknowledging the centrality of religion to the project neither can youth be examined in the historical context of Colonial Lima without a consideration of the prevalent theological ideas and debates regarding youth at the same time. The Church and its agents saw the education and indoctrination of unbelievers including children and youth as of extreme importance. At this particular point and in relation to the young, missionaries and priests generally acknowledged the “... doctrine of infant depravity, which held that childhood folly was a manifestation of original sin” (Dean 22). This idea

³⁷ Spiritual texts such as those written by our about mystics such as Santa Teresa de Ávila or San Juan de la Cruz were resoundingly popular prior to the Spanish conquest even as they paid brief and often superficial attention to the early development of these persons, focusing on first their births in noble and virtuous families, second on the formation of their character, and only third and finally on their education and formal training (Lavrín 127).

³⁸ See Chapter Three. Future research should consider the importance of youth and adolescence in the writing of conquest literature as many of the conquistadores and their scribes were in their teenage years during the conquest and wrote about these times much later. An additional point of further inquiry would examine comparatively the formal links between the spiritual biographies and the inclusion of personal elements within the conquest narratives.

infused society to the extent that children were expected to misbehave and any misbehavior could be seen as having both divine and natural origins. The idea of infant depravity also explicitly articulated a direct link between a child's "immature physical condition" and their "imperfect mental and spiritual states" (22).^{39;40} In fact, Catholic theologians and educators were greatly concerned with the both the moral and the physical development of the young and sought to regulate each through rigorous religious instruction. This intellectual and physical imperfection is found throughout literature, although and as I will show in the subsequent chapters, liminal texts problematize the idea of redemption as a means of overcoming these imperfections.

Examinations of texts considering the development of Catholic youth involves first and foremost an acknowledgment of the fact that the Catholic Church and its various orders had not reached a single consensus regarding the state of the child or adolescent. Considering the spiritual definition of children then also calls for a consideration of the intricate and continued debates regarding the position of children and adolescents relative to both the Church and particularly the sacraments. Texts that varied from as the

³⁹ Dean goes even further in suggesting that the very practice of separating or acknowledging a separation between an individual's physical state or status and the same individual's moral and intellectual development as exercised in the conceptualization of a child provided a key component in the way "childhood as a separate mental state emerged" in early modern Europe (Dean 22). She also suggests that by viewing childhood as an abstraction formed through the understanding of a fluid relationship between a young person's body and mind Catholic Europe permitted the creation of childhood as a period in which normal (or adult-centric) expectations simply failed to apply even if the person was understood as being "capable of reason" (22). This same logic was used to justify the paternalistic attitudes the colonizing European powers adopted towards their indigenous subjects. As Bianca Premo explains "Para la ideología política de los españoles tanto el terreno del derecho masculino como el de los mayores de edad eran más concéntricos que contiguos. La patria potestad, o el derecho de autoridad que los padres poseían sobre sus hijos menores de edad, estaba relacionado directamente con la autoridad que el Rey español poseía sobre sus súbditos coloniales" [In the Spanish political ideology, the sphere of masculine rights as the rights of those "of age" were more concentric rather than contiguous. *La patria potestad* [Patriarcal Power], or the authority parents possessed over their underage children was related directly to the authority that the Spanish King possessed over his colonial subjects](Premo "Estado de miedo" 189).

⁴⁰ Subjugated indigenous peoples were also viewed as children, most certainly in the eyes of the Catholic church but also often in the perspective of colonial law.

Augustinian Priest Fray Pedro Salguero's *Vida del venerable y ejemplarísimo varón, el M.F. Diego Basalenque, provincial que fue de la Provincia de San Nicolás de Michoacán* [The Life of the Venerable and Exemplary Man, M.F. Diego Basalenque, from the Providence of San Nicolas of Michoacan] (1664) to the Jesuit Baltasar Gracián's seminal *El criticón* showed the emergence of childhood and youth as special time separate from *madurez* (maturity) but also the potential existence of various phases of childhood or youth. Lavrin discerns in Fray Pedro Salguero's 1664 text, the presence of specific and distinguishable phases of childhood. One example of such phases suggested the later phase of *niñez* [childhood] or "la puericia"⁴¹ retained great significance as it was the "edad de aprender" [age of learning] during which a young person should be exposed to "enseñanza rigurosa" [rigorous education] in order to counter "la inconstancia y el bullicio" [fickleness and bustle] to which youth would otherwise be prone (Salguero 6-9 as cited by Lavrin 126). Fictional accounts of aging and of young people in this age range tend to demonstrate a general shift of intellectual ability, yet, particularly in the cases I examine, any fickleness emerges not from a biological or extra-historical necessity but as situational responses to social inducements. For example, Idolina's illness and physical inability could certainly be read as a sort of teenage rebellion yet to do so strips her resistance from the setting and stimuli that provoke her anger and that leave her with very few options. *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] Matilde demonstrates a similar vacillation yet reducing her ambivalence to an idea of fickleness or bustle again

⁴¹ *La puericia* is defined by the Real Academia Española as the "edad del hombre que media entre la infancia y la adolescencia, esto es, desde los siete años hasta los catorce" [the age of men that mediates infancy and adolescence, this is the time between seven and fourteen years of age] ("Puericia").

disconnects the character's inconsistency from its source: the social matrix which leaves her with few options.

As we see echoed through the literary works of Rosario Castellanos, Jorge Amado, and José María Arguedas as well as in the historical treatment of youth in the context of the American colonization, the Catholic Church has long recognized various phases of young life in relation to ideas of their eternal salvation. The writings of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas provide two schematics outlining the phases of childhood. Although other strategies existed these two may be considered of primary importance due to their sources and impact on Catholic theology and religious and social practices that endure to this day.⁴² The following paragraphs examine these two strategies for understanding youth in the context of Catholic thought.

Aristotle's idea of childhood envisioned children as "pure, innocent, uncultivated potential" (Traina 106). According to Gareth Matthews and Amy Mullin in their entry for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entitled "The Philosophy of Childhood" Aristotle's writings about children come from his treatises on Final and Formal Causality, two of the four forms of causality Aristotle's works describe. The writers assert that

[Aristotle] thinks of the Formal Cause of the organism as the form or structure it normally has in maturity, where that form or structure is thought to enable the organism to perform its functions well. According to this conception, a human child is an immature specimen of the organism type, human, which, by nature, has the potentiality to develop into a mature

⁴² For more information, please see Cristina L.H. Traina's illuminating article "A Person in the Making: Thomas Aquinas on Children and Childhood." *The Child in Christian Thought*.

specimen with the structure, form, and function of a normal or standard adult (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*).⁴³

This lack of maturity and in particular a lack of mature thought meant for some theologians that children could not be held accountable in questions of good or evil due to their lack of maturity and particularly their lack of mental development (Traina 106). However, and again according to Matthews and Mullin, Aristotle's work does show a "scaffolding for understanding how moral development takes place," particularly in his *Nichomachean Ethics*. Traina identifies a result of this thinking in the emergence of "childhood [as] just a stage in a person's life-long process in virtue" and notes that early church thinkers who adopted this tended to elevate the perspectives of younger individuals. The writer St. Benedict of Nursia, for example, wrote that older clergy should "make a practice of respecting the opinions of younger monks, to whom 'the Lord often reveals the best course'" (Traina 106, and St. Benedict of Nursia, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, chapters 64 and 3 as quoted in Traina 106).⁴⁴ While this idea of complete innocence and purity is absent from the young people considered in this project, it does still profoundly impact the horizon of expectations against which young people come to be read. For the sake of literary studies and particularly in the case of orphaned, abandoned or otherwise imperiled youth, the vulnerability and precariousness of young

⁴³ Matthews and Mullin go on to make the interesting point that "Many adults today have this broadly Aristotelian conception of childhood without having actually read any of Aristotle. It informs their understanding of their own relationship toward the children around them. Thus, they consider the fundamental responsibility they bear toward their children to be the obligation to provide the kind of supportive environment those children need to develop into normal adults, with the biological and psychological structures in place needed to perform the functions we assume that normal, standard adults can perform."

⁴⁴ Certainly, young monks would not have been confused with children but their liminal stature was viewed as granting them a more essentially *communitas* status. See Chapter 4 of this dissertation for a more complete depiction of this dynamic.

characters' situations emerges from literature as profound and troubling particularly when read against this Aristotelian idea about their potentiality for other outcomes, had the educational and social mechanisms been more apt. This approach thus echoes, for example, in the priest's treatment of the orphaned boys in Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands].

To approach Aquinas' ideas regarding youth not only requires the consideration of Aristotle's writings as Aristotle represented Aquinas' "central philosophical authority" but also Aquinas' "primary theological authority," St. Augustine, whose writings on youth differ dramatically from Aristotle's (Traina 105). In contrast with Aristotle, Augustine saw children as "masses of inordinate desires... essentially sinful, selfish, and repulsed by all things good and holy" (Traina 105). They did not sin but "only because they lack the physical strength to do harm" and the only "cure" for this state was "'convalescence' from original sin and its effects through the sacraments, prayer, and tutelage, which – through the aid of grace – curb, heal, and redirect these desires, producing virtue and devotion" (105, see also Stortz, M. "Where or when was your servant innocent? Augustine on Childhood" in *The Child in Christian Thought*). This idea of convalescence, or "healing" rather than overcoming youth can be found throughout Rosario Castellanos' fiction and into her poetry, which will be discussed in this dissertation's final chapter.

Augustine's and Aristotle's ideas differed dramatically yet, as Traina writes, "to adopt an extreme version of either [set of] convictions would be to choose one of two heretical positions: deterministic nihilism, the belief that human will is essentially and irretrievably evil and sinful; or Pelagianism, the belief that people are essentially good

and can save themselves through good works” (106). Traina acknowledges that, in his writings, Aquinas finds a middle ground by agreeing with Augustine “that original sin renders the unbaptized unworthy of salvation” but also with Aristotle by asserting “the natural capacity [of a person] to grow in virtue and wisdom” (106). In this theology, grace “complet[es] rather than correct[s] nature” even as Aquinas refuses “to discard a strong doctrine of original sin in favor of developmentalism” (106). These shifting ideas and the necessity of a theological rebalancing perhaps underscores the distinct approaches and general ambivalence found in literature’s treatment of youth as well. Although occurring with different terms and in the context of a distinct discourse, namely theology, this debate reflects and anticipates the more “modern” discussion regarding the “naturalized” treatment of young people’s behavior. Literature stands, as I will show and argue throughout the final two chapters, to offer a distinct view of youth in the process of growing and as agents that navigate these debates while coming to terms with their own senses of interiority.

Returning to the theological debate, the quote presented above illuminates the serious stakes at the center of this theological battle: if children and particularly infants or even the unborn were guilty of the original sin, their unbaptized deaths implied eternal damnation or at minimum an extended period spent in limbo. On the other hand, an idea of developing self would result in graduated responsibility such that an older and more mature person could be held more or fully accountable whereas a child, particularly a young one, could not. Traina writes that Aquinas never fully resolves this dilemma between the writings of Augustine and Aristotle but she also illustrates how his work retains a “developmental anthropology” along with “phases of childhood development”

which highlight the imperfections but also the potential of the individual. It is this balanced dichotomy that can be found to some extent in even the deeply problematic characters such as Amado's Pedro Bala while Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] engages with the problematic dogma of such phases.

For St. Thomas Aquinas, reason provides the key, determining factor that allow for the discernment of distinct phases of childhood and youth. Aquinas describes these phases as follows

The first is when a person neither understands by himself nor is able to learn from another; the second stage is when a man can learn from another but is incapable by himself of considerations and understanding; the third degree is when a man is both able to learn from another and to consider by himself. And since reason develops in man by little and little, in proportion as the movement and fluctuation of the humors is calmed, man reaches the first stage of reason before his seventh year; and consequently, during that period he is unfit for any contract, and therefore for betrothal. But he begins to reach the second stage at the end of his first seven years, wherefore children at that age are sent to school. But man begins to reach the third stage at the end of his second seven years, as regards things concerning his person [e.g., marriage], when his natural reason develops; but as regards things outside his person [e.g., property] at the end of his third seven years (St. Thomas Aquinas from the *Summa Theologiae* as quoted in Traina 112).⁴⁵

These three categories – defined “classically” as *infantia* (prior to age 7), *pueritia* (seven to 14), and *adolescentia* (14 through “young adulthood”) – each retained specific abilities and received distinct manners of divine grace; at the same time, even though St. Thomas Aquinas himself was not particularly careful how the terms were employed, typically call[ing] children *pueris*, whether they occupy the stage classically labeled *infantia*...

⁴⁵ It is interesting but tangential for the current argument that even in writing a theological account of children St. Thomas Aquinas cannot remove himself from offering commentary on the legal status of children, vis-à-vis the ability of a young person to enter into certain contracts. This demonstrates how such categories of a person’s legal and spiritual status were not divided into these categories but rather that age provided a more useful means of categorical designation.

pueritia..., or *adolescentia* (Traina 113).⁴⁶ Nonetheless, despite his lack of usage, Aquinas certainly focuses his theology upon each of the stages and reveals particular challenges and concerns therein as well. Within this scheme, *Infantia* provided “the greatest challenge to Thomas’ Aristotelian-Augustinian synthesis,” according to Traina as Aquinas’ theology seemed unable to account for children’s legal innocence and divine guilt (114-117). *Pueritia* and its attendant awareness of a child’s “dawning of rational thought” contrasted from the earlier phase in its acknowledgement that “with reason come the incipient capacities for formal learning, moral accountability, sin and virtue” (117). Children in this category were understood to be somewhat aware of the consequences of their actions and also to retain the ability to do something about their actions: namely act with some restraint or self-discipline, understand their own baptism, and seek forgiveness and absolution in the case of an error.⁴⁷ Given the importance of individual actions at this stage it should not be surprising that Thomas included a level of “self-determination that actually exceeds that of some later periods and authors” particularly in his interest regarding the legal decisions children at this age were permitted to make.⁴⁸ Finally, as Traina demonstrates through her chapter, for all intents and purposes *adolescentia* in Aquinas’ theology was almost entirely equivalent to

⁴⁶ Traina refers her readers to David Nicholas’ article “Childhood in Medieval Europe”, published in *Children in Historical and Comparative Perspective: An International Handbook* for further information regarding the malleability and “loose” application of technical definitions.

⁴⁷ In Aquinas’ theological thought, the exact moment in which a person moved from *infantia* to *pueritia* was obscure but crucial. This was due to the fact that, as soon as a young person was aware of the fact that he (or she) was acting outside of grace and could chose instead to “direct himself to the due end” or into the Church, the child was in a state of mortal sin until the moment at which he sought Baptism.

⁴⁸ Traina provides some insight into Aquinas’ own biography and particularly his family’s reluctance in his seeking of a sacred vocation. Traina gently suggest that this biographical information illuminates Aquinas’ concern with the ability of young people to act, occasionally, against their parents’ wishes or even the desires of the Church. The latter case could happen in a young person’s life if he or she had been committed to religious service early but did not wish to continue in this course upon reaching later *pueritia* or *adolescentia*.

spiritual adulthood. The only major considerations remained in Aquinas' "accounting for circumstances, for the actors' degree of rationality, and for their level of knowledge" which seemingly signified additional "special allowances for adolescents" that St. Thomas Aquinas rarely seemed to make in his own dealings with youths (120).

The majority of the youths considered in the literary analysis fall loosely into the categories of Pueritia and Adolescentia, with a few outliers residing beyond these categories and with youths such as Oscar Wao, the Captains of the Sands, and the "cachorros" [pups] growing through the various phases. The following chapters engage primarily with these ideas but through the more generalized contemporary concepts of "child" and "adolescent" which at once generalize these earlier, theological and socialized understandings while also incorporating 20th and 21st century scientific and social praxes of age and age grading as well. These latter concepts will be discussed in this chapter's conclusion.

*Children and Youth at the Time of the Conquest and the Colonization of Peru*⁴⁹

While the theological debates contextualized the understanding of youth and the churches' and the schools' approaches towards children, the significance of childhood and adolescence in the context of the Catholic Spanish colonies varied somewhat in relevance to the lives of those living in the distinct colonies. On one hand, this was due to the fact that the daily lives of those living in the Spanish colonies differed significantly between each separate viceroyalty (*virreinato*).⁵⁰ As both a colonial and an imperial

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that many of the Spanish conquerors were relatively young at the time of the conquest. Most conquest narratives were, somewhat problematically, written much later in the conquistadors' lives. A notable exception involves the writings of Pedro de Cieza de Leon.

⁵⁰ The oldest of the four viceroyalties, the Viceroyalty of Nueva España with its capital in the Ciudad de México and the Viceroyalty of Perú with its capital city, Ciudad de los Reyes, were established in the corresponding years of 1535 and 1543 (Klaren 86).

center, Lima functioned during in the colonial period as a “cosmopolitan city, a potpourri of nations as “races,” of wealth and poverty, and alive with the energy of newness” (Silverblatt 20). At the same time, and despite these superficial promises of European modernity, Sara Castro-Kláren demonstrates how Lima’s centrality should be considered part of the rhetoric of Spain’s conquest and as she finds in the establishment of Lima’s Plaza de Armas, “the four major instruments in Colonial rule – Church, judiciary, executive, and pillory or *picota*” (Castro-Kláren 426). These institutions functioned to centralize Lima’s authority in ways that will be described below, yet it should be recalled Lima’s centrality was always “blurred” (Castro-Kláren 426) by its subservience to the distant, Iberian monarchy, the pull of other colonial urban centers, and in the perseverance and resistance of pre-colonial cities including most importantly, Cuzco.⁵¹

In considering youth in the situation of Colonial Lima, outside of their families, children engaged with the Catholic Church in their daily lives through catechism classes and in the preparation for and taking of communion. The setting of the boarding school in Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] demonstrates this sort of formal interactions while the boys in both Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] and Amado’s *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] interact regularly with priests, especially in their earlier years. At the same time and in returning our consideration to the colonial period, Christian education “tenía que alcanzar a todos” [had to reach everyone] even if

⁵¹ Again, it is outside the scope of this project to trace the entire legal entity that involved itself in the regulation of the Spanish territories yet it is important to note that the conquest and colonization took place against a backdrop informed by the specter of the Inquisition and the distant Spanish court. Children were not immune but could be brought to trial for crimes such as heresy and witchcraft, although these cases do seem somewhat rare. The Inquisitorial Courts went so far as to establish the Santa Cruz de Atocha school for orphaned girls (Premo *Children* 103).⁵¹ The only requirements for this school involved the fact that girls “had to be españolas, to have been baptized, and to be ‘true orphans,’ that is to have never met their parents and to possess no information about them” (Premo *Children* 103).

the methods differed in the approach to educating individual groups varied (Gonzalbo 110). As Pilar Gonzalbo writes, while “no olvidaron los frailes la instrucción de los hombres y mujeres, a quienes dedicaron manuales especiales y el horario dominical... pusieron mayor empeño en el adoctrinamiento de los niños” [the friars did not forget the education of men and women for which special manuals and the Sunday schedules were dedicated, they put greater determination into the indoctrination of children] (110). Methodologically, this process involved daily catechism classes attended by the children of poor Peninsular or Criollo families and indigenous families alike (110). More elite families sent their offspring to religious “‘apostentos’ en donde podían vivir en régimen de internado” [‘lodgings’ in which they could live under a regime as a long-term boarder] (110-11).⁵² Structurally these lodging institutions certainly resonate with the structured boarding schools still found in Arguedas’ and Vargas Llosa’s writing.

Much like in Ancient Greece, religious and technical education of rich and poor children differed based on a series of assumptions of both current and future necessity. The children of poor parents, indigenous or Spanish or, eventually mestizo, memorized catechism and learned particular skills in “talleres artísticos” [artisan workshops] organized by the local convents (Gonzalbo 111). Such workshops produced “sastres, pintores, carpinteros, herreros y conocedores de otros oficios” [tailors, painters, carpenters, blacksmiths, and other kinds of tradesmen] (111). In contrast, the children of Spanish, Criollo, and occasionally indigenous elites, “a ellos les enseñaba a memorizar los textos latinos imprescindibles para asistir al sacerdote en los oficios divinos, a hablar

⁵² In my translation, I have chosen to avoid using the term ‘boarding school’ even if these ‘apostados’ are structurally quite similar and very possibly retain a historical relationship. I avoid this term in order to avoid other considerations of the boarding school including the isolation and secular depravity that emerged with the term’s use in the 19th century.

el castellano en algunos casos, a escribir con caracteres latinos... a cantar y a tañer instrumentos musicales” [they were taught to memorize essential Latin texts in order to assist the priest in sacred tasks, occasionally they were taught to speak Spanish, to write with Latin letters... and to sing and to play musical instruments] (111). This hierarchy of educational and social skills most certainly recalls similar sets of skills found in both Tawantinsuyu and Ancient Greece. As mentioned previously, this still resonates with the education of boys in Arguedas’ novels and stories.

Beyond the technical skills, catechism and the repetition of moralizing stories provided more common and distinct praxes to the Christian and particularly Catholic religious practices found in Colonial Lima and throughout the conquered colonies. This aspect of religious indoctrination included the memorization and repetition of the stories of the lives of the Saints as well as the “‘lectura’ de las imágenes” [the ‘reading’ of images] (Gonzalbo 111). A popular saint for hagiography in Colonial Lima was most certainly Santa Rosa de Lima, the first American to become canonized an act completed in the first half of the 17th century. A Dominican ascetic and mystic, Santa Rosa was born the daughter of a Peninsular soldier and an American born Criolla. Frank Graziano provides an in-depth analysis regarding the ecclesiastical processes undertaken in the establishment of Santa Rosa de Lima’s sainthood and the way these responded to a particular local need as well. Graziano elaborates on several crucial components regarding the way theological discourse came to construct the lives of saints, including Rosa de Lima so that these exemplary lives would be used to communicate various lessons to Christians in need of particular guidance. Among several other factors that

Graziano explores thoroughly in his book *Wounds of Love: The Mystical Marriage of Saint Rose of Lima*, such hagiographic narratives focused on

The way an aspirant to sanctity conducted his or her life, usually in imitation of canonized models of sainthood[;] the elaboration of that life in rumor and folklore (including reports of miracles) during the person's lifetime[;]... the polished narration of the life, now with greater poetic license, in new hagiographies written to advocate canonization [;]... [and] The postcanonization iconography that formalizes the dominant motifs and stresses select hagiographic episodes (Graziano 35-36).

Thus as the use of Santa Rosa de Lima's hagiography was formed and structured by priests and church officials her identity would "continue[] to evolve across the centuries" and in service to instructional lessons that reshaped the few original texts regarding her life (36). As Graziano explains

Oral tradition anticipates and provides a basis for the narrative that hagiographers produce in (predominantly male) high culture, and it then returns to this official version to readapt it to new devotions [so that] Saints, to this degree, are authored from the bottom up. They are what popular devotion makes of them, and the erudition of the Church intervenes—in collaboration or in objection—to formalize, sanitize, historicize, and canonize life stories that the faithful (the last word is theirs) continue to revise (36).

Particularly in the case of Santa Rosa de Lima but also in the hagiographies of the Virgin



Image VI

Mary. Such narratives were used to instruct young boys and girls in order that they would aspire to lead exemplary lives.

The oral and visual nature of these stories were certainly useful in the context of a colonial situation wherein few could read.

In these religious indoctrination processes, the many and various convents provided important centers not entirely unlike the distinct religious centers in Ancient Greece. Likewise,

gendered education is prevalent particularly in the works of

Castellanos and Arguedas whose novels involving the education of young people. In theory, the convent provided a separate space at the local level overseen by local authorities (Harrison 53). Such an approach would permit local groups comprised of lower level priests to oversee the daily operations and to respond to local issues. In practice, however, as Regina Harrison points out, this practice was often much more convoluted with hierarchical power structures that often branched beyond the colonial situation in Lima but rather back to the Iberian Peninsula (53).⁵³ One result of this diffuse power involved the vulnerability of women and girls relative to the much more powerful church. Regina Harrison recalls two infamous cases involving Jesuit priests who used their positions to sexually violate young women.⁵⁴ Physical violence was also found as

⁵³ An additional important consideration involves the fact that neither mestizos nor indigenous religious officials were permitted places of authority at this local level, at least in the 16th century. See Regina Harrison's *Sin and Confession in Colonial Peru*.

⁵⁴ The most famous of these cases involved María Pizarro, an adolescent abused by the Jesuit priest, Luis López. For his crimes, López was "expelled from Peru, served two years under arrest in a Jesuit house, and never again was allowed to confess women" (Harrison 141). "Another Jesuit priest... Miguel de Fuentes" was found guilty of having sexual intercourse with nuns in the Convent of La Concepción in Lima. Unlike López, Fuentes remained in Peru and was permitted to continue confessing women after ten years (141).

part of this relationship and Guaman Poma de Ayala in his *El primer nueva crónica y buen gobierno* [The First New Chronicle and Good Government] illustrates a priest physically assaulting a pregnant female parishioner (see Image VI on the left, source Guaman Poma Image 590).

Inscribing Age: Potestad and the Strategic Employment of Age

In Colonial Lima, as in ancient Greece, the lives of the young were circumscribed within both family, the Church, and political bodies. This system granted families a primary role in the instruction and education of children and particularly understood the family as part of a paternal system, not unlike the Greek. If immediate family was absent other social establishments, including “orphanages, religious houses, and schools”, all maintained particular roles in the regulation of young people’s behavior and the transmission of cultural values to the young colonists. Of course, the efficacy and applicability of the various institutions’ missions varied significantly based on the social status and racial categorization of each individual.

The idea of “*potestad*” [authority] provided a central organizing principle that permitted the ordering of hierarchical social structures on the level of the empire to the family as well. Premo writes that in their private lives of families the idea of “*potestad*” acted as a “guiding political philosophy for laws governing the households of the Spanish territories” (Premo 23). Under the *potestad*, yet another concept inherited by the Spanish from the Romans who called the idea *potestas*, family units functioned quite similarly to the Greek idea of *oikos*. For the Spanish, the family could thus regulate the behavior of its children, bearing both the legal and the spiritual obligation to do so. Certainly, the Spanish understood this concept in relation to their spiritual practices, seeing in the

family a reflection of “divine law”, yet in practice it concerned much more earthly interests, including the “regulation” of “the relationship between forebears and their progeny” (Premo 23). The law required that the male head of household act as the “*patria potestad*” and that “the primary legal persona of the minor of age was that of an *hijo de familia*, or a child whose property and person fell subject to the male head of household” (23). In effect this idea doubled the minority of those of “minor edad” (minor age) as “to be a minor was a relational as much as an age-based status” implying minority both in front of the law and “a situation of subordination to the padre of the family” (23).⁵⁵

Examining the idea of paternal authority in the context of the Spanish colonies and particularly with reference to Bianca Premo’s study of colonial Lima demonstrates that the assumed position of children in connection to their families introduced particular cultural tensions to the environment of the family. Like the courts, “fathers possessed...the right – even the moral and civic obligation – to punish their children” and in such a manner that could be considered firm and strong while avoiding “excessive or unjust” levels of punishment (Premo “Minor Offenses” 116). “Potestad” thus permitted and even encouraged the development of the series of punishments and rewards that determined and encouraged “proper” behavior even into the 20th century. This latter system will be elaborated throughout the final chapter.

Even as “potestad” created a scenario of patriarchal, authoritarian control, age could sometimes be used expediently to find flexibility and flux within this system. To

⁵⁵ It is important to note here that women’s legal status in Spain, as in Greece, remained somewhat tenuous. Premo takes umbrage with scholars who would argue that “women and children were always minors under the tutelage of a senior male.” She argues that “strictly speaking... women were not minors” as they could, “in certain instances... manage their own assets, possess property if not always usufruct over it, and even represent themselves and others in court” (24-25).

that end, and unlike a person's biological sex, social class, and ethnic status – indelible social markers in the context of colonial Spanish American society, age functioned in a much more “strategically” ambiguous way, at least in the setting of the colonial courts (Premo “Minor Offenses” 121-129). This is to say that certain benefits and rights ascribed to young victims or criminals ended when a person reached twenty-five or even earlier. In cases where youth or youthful looking people were accused of a crime, lawyers for the defense would spend a great deal of time arguing the young age of a defendant as they would receive lighter punishments due to their age. At the same time, youth could also protect victims – particularly those who had been sexually assaulted – not only under the auspices of the court but also in the eyes of broader society. For example, Premo points to a case involving a young girl who had been raped by her mother's “*compadre* and erstwhile babysitter”, noting that the mother repeatedly called her daughter a “toddler (*una párvula*)” while the “accused rapist... countered that [she] was thirteen” (Premo “Minor” 125). One reason for the underreporting of age – Rosa, the girl in this case, was revealed to be six-years-old, neither a toddler nor an adolescent – involved the assumed responsibility ascribed to girls who had been raped even if particularly young. In reporting her daughter as “*una párvula*”, Rosa's mother would have expected additional court protections that a slightly older girl could not, as “girls entering adolescence became vulnerable to accusations against their honor” and were sometimes argued as capable of providing consent (Premo “Minor” 125).⁵⁶ In fact, even though the law

⁵⁶ A person's appearance and the subjective estimation of a person's age often came into play in the colonial situations wherein the baptismal certificate functioned as pretty much the only real document “proving” a person's age. The courts often “through the *agentes fiscales*, the scribes, and the *alcaldes* who oversaw the assigning of ages during interrogation” (Premo “Minor” 125) would often work together in the establishing of a person's age. In the absence of the crucial baptismal document, age would be assigned “based on... appearance (*al parecer*” or “*por su aspecto*”)” (Premo “Minor” 122).

established girls under the age of twelve as “sexual innocents”, incapable of consenting to have sex and equally incapable of “seducing” a man into having sex with them, in practice families tended to ascribe this innocence to girls under the age of eight instead of the legally prescribed age (Premo “Minor” 125). Yet even in official statements such as that offered by the *agente fiscal* in Rosa’s case that “no stain can fall on her conduct at such a young age” subtly demonstrate how a young girl’s “sexual purity... was not free of suspicion”, in either the perspective of the court or society as a whole (125). As we will see and particularly in the fourth chapter, this idea of “suspicion” leads to situations in which case young female bodies come to represent threats not only to the girls themselves but also to the survival of families.⁵⁷

Colonial Lima in Summation

As we have seen, the ‘Doctrine of Infant Depravity’ and the idea of the ‘age of reason’ occupied and continue to enact problematic theological questions in the context of the Catholic church. Moreover, even as this important theological problem was never resolved it certainly remained in debate in the church and particularly in the Catholic colonies as they continue to debate ideas of humanity but also, importantly, maturity in light of its involvement in the conquest and colonization of the American lands. These complex debates although bound initially to theological considerations of youth inform the cultural contexts that produce the literary works we will consider. The debates therefore never fully resolve and, particularly as I have shown in the debates between Augustine and Aristotle, in fact lead to a productive intellectual balance permitting paradoxical beliefs to coexist. Finally, while Spanish authority or ‘potestad’ revered

⁵⁷ See the fourth chapter’s analysis of *Sin nombre* [Nameless] and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

hierarchical and patriarchal beliefs and social structures in the idea and praxes of age we find a useful means of elaborating upon the little social flux permitted within this system.

Additional and Contemporary Considerations of the Adolescent Borderlands

As the previous analyses have shown, children and adolescents have long existed in liminal situations relative to the adults comprising their respective society's concepts of majority. Yet the specifics regarding this treatment, namely the social treatment of biological sex and sexuality, the incorporation of adolescent labor into the broader local/imperial economies, and the service required of youth, whether military or ecclesiastical, responds to social needs and sometimes in line with guiding principles. This dissertation argues for the consideration of adolescents as liminal subjects, that is as individuals whose existence situates them in proximity to a set of specific yet complex and fluid boundaries relating to human identity. The examination of Ancient Greece and Colonial Lima permitted the consideration of a few concepts and contexts that will be useful to the following chapters' considerations of fictional representations of youth in these liminal situations. At the same time, to engage with these 20th and 21st century works requires a few more recent concepts as well. In the paragraphs that follow, I briefly show how contemporary ideas of age and age classification are not ahistorical and thus apolitical concepts or practices of categorization. Additionally, I will consider how the "lengthening of adolescence", although a relatively recent discovery to the life and social sciences has already been anticipated by literary works that problematize the temporal limits of adolescence – in some cases demonstrating abbreviated, curtailed or even prolonged periods of adolescence developments as individual responses to external factors. As such, experience and positive praxes of self-identification must contend with

not only questions of age both also with other liminal dynamics with which each individual contends throughout their life. Approached as such, adolescence as liminal identity also exposes the liminal space in which young individuals exist and from which they think and act.

Basic considerations regarding the ability of liminal subjects to act with agency have been considered previously in chapter one of this project. Prior to examining how literary figures represent and problematize the border spaces that they occupy, however, two additional concepts merit brief consideration for the ways that they have appeared and reappeared as historical and social challenges to the consideration of youth and in particular the ways discourses define them. These considerations involve the problems and prevalence of age and age grading in the contemporary considerations of youth.

The Limits of Age: Personal Identity in Science's Age of Limits

As a germane element to the consideration of identity, age initially seems to avoid the theoretical baggage tied to considerations of gender, race, or class. Likewise, the classification of individuals into groups wherein calendric age provides the only common factor also seems a natural given. Yet it bears noting that race, nationality, gender, and class were each understood to be naturally occurring and biologically determined categories in their own right little more than a century ago (Salmi 58-61). It was only through careful, critical processes performed in the Social Sciences and the Humanities that the social, structural, or historical dynamics present in the construction and utilization of each of these concepts came to be revealed. Age remains uniquely understudied among the analogous concepts of race and gender despite the fact that, like the others, age does not provide either a universal or a complete map to considering

biological, neurological, and social growth, development, or maturity in humans. To illustrate with a particular example, while the onset of puberty and the attendant development of “adult” sexual characteristics has historically provided the determinative event separating the states of child- and adulthood, such an understanding has proven deficient for many reasons including the fact that not every person develops adult sexual characteristics and even those who may often undergo distinct and individual processes or phases of development. The experience of becoming an adult, and thus passing through the liminal phase of adolescence, is one of individual change and though generally similar is not universally the same.

Age and Age Grading

On the surface, age appears to function as a biological truth. In the scientific discourses, birth and death provide the two framing events marked by the rhetorical pronouncement “time of birth” and “time of death” respectively. This marking of “biological age” posits the human body, and by extension human experience, squarely within a standardized notion of chronological, linear time. One could perhaps go so far as to argue that these rhetorical pronouncements even perpetuate the myth of linear time as the unproblematic scape to which individuals must submit. Charles Dickens permits his narrator David Copperfield to comment on this peculiar arrangement, noting in the beginning of his text that “To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o’clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously (Dickens 15). As this quote illustrates, the foundational event – in the case of the quote, the narrator’s birth – does not permit immediate ontological grounding. Rather, even the fact of an individual’s birth

requires, at the minimum, one external interlocutor to report a fact that may only later be understood by the actual subject of the event, the person-born. Literature has long indulged in the drama inherent in the unknown, mysterious, or misrepresented details of a character's provenance. From the ancient myths of children found in the wild and raised by animals to more contemporary tales of dubiously reported parentage, literature has subtly acknowledged that individuals are subject to their own foundational myths and that these myths may, and have been, manipulated in service to other historical or social forces. Postmodern theory occasionally goes so far as to suggest that all events are unknowable but require historicization for understanding (Buchanan); yet even a more conservative reading of the birth of individuals reveals individual subjects as functioning components of narratives that predate and exclude the active participation of the individual. Rosario Castellanos' novels *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] and her *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] both concern themselves with youth as a form of narrative disruption. *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] introduces its young narrator as she interrupts her older Nana's story about indigenous massacres and posits its narrator and her whims as an interruption in the conflict between the dominant, Mexican narrative and the subjugated indigenous story of repression and survival. *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] goes even further in representing Domingo's birth, at the time of an eclipse, and his later violent crucifixion as a means through which Catalina and her followers can revolt against the dominant culture. This act is not only powerful in the symbolic crucifixion but also in the way it creates a full arc of the young boy's life as begun in a time of symbolic importance and ended under similarly murky symbolic circumstances.

As a second point of consideration, age merits deliberation as a product of chronological time, a concept which even experts in the sciences who work daily with time do not fully understand nor are they able to fully explain. Tim O'Brian, Chief at the United States' National Institute of Standards and Technology and the leader of the NIST's Time and Frequency Division, commented that his "own personal opinion is that time is a human construct", adding that "We can measure time much better than the weight of something or an electrical current... but what time really is, is a question that I can't answer for you" (Brumfiel). In fact, what O'Brian observes is the fact that time regularly opens itself up for consideration, speculation, and localized practices of observation, evaluation, and measurement. Prior to the 19th century in particular, global understanding accommodated for a variety of practices relating to time. Walter Mignolo suggests that as early as the sixteenth century European intellectuals began to see "both, the separation of space and [and the separation of] time from cosmological experience of time (four seasons, the time of the harvest, the movement and the impact of the rotation of earth...)" and suggests that this separation also "explain[s] in par the separation of "nature" from the human body: "natural phenomena" tak[ing] place out there, in space and time outside of us (*Darker Side* 158-159). This observation demonstrates that, at one point, time and experience were understood as fully linked; yet human understanding of time has regularly acknowledged the complexity of time and thus this quote also fully illustrates the fact that Western ideas of time have changed significantly and in particular moments of intellectual advancement. Understanding time as based on annually marked age as opposed to other possible cyclical values, such as stage of life for example, thus inextricably connects age to western praxes regarding time.

Accepting a nuanced understanding of chronological time returns us to a consideration of age. Simply put, age counts itself out linearly from birth, yet its significance varies greatly to the distinct discourses to study it. Practitioners in the fields of Education, Sociology, and Anthropology alongside critical and youth theorists have called for the practical understanding that emphasizes two distinct practices of age: biological and social age. These practitioners pragmatically sidestep critiques of chronological time in the consideration of biological age is an ahistorical concept defined in the discourse of the biological sciences and unfolding chronologically (Jones 60). Yet but adding the idea of a social age these intellectuals resituate the individual in a historical construct which shows that “while age is a biological given, it is socially manipulated and manipulable” (60). As an example of the manipulations to which age may be subject, the sociologist Gil Jones describes “the act of ascribing common interest and social unity to a biologically defined age group can be seen as an example of such manipulation” (60).⁵⁸ One particularly effective mechanism through which these manipulations are carried out occurs in what the social historian of adolescence, Nancy Lesko, calls the “homiletic” rhetoric of adolescence (*Act Your Age* 7). For Lesko, homiletic rhetoric involves phrasing that seemingly elevates a particular subject, in this case the adolescent, while “really confer[ing] greater authority on the author of the homily” (7-8). Such conversations regarding age utilize homiletic language to marginalize not only the young but also the old. Homiletic discourses thus use “aging” to describe older persons while reserving language of “transition” for adolescents (7). In

⁵⁸ The philosopher Santiago Castro Gomez has studied the mechanisms through which the 19th century scientist loses his identity while simultaneously and paradoxically establishing his own vantage point as predominant. He calls this dynamic the “hubris of the zero point” and it will be considered at greater depth below.

both these phrases, the language of aging or transition, language functions to marginalize both groups from a central locus of enunciation that obscures itself delicately in the very act of description. Moreover, this continues a tradition I considered already in the context of Colonial Lima above as youth emerges from such praxes as conveniently malleable based on social and discursive necessities.

An additional and important apparatus that substantiates age as an ahistorical and substance-giving trait involves the way in which the fields of law and psychology collude in the treatment of age. Law and scientific discourses collude to establish the importance and universality of age. This most certainly commences with an individual's birth and death, which provide not only "meaningful" scientific data regarding the development of an individual but are supported by the legal documentation establishing these moments as vital for documentation. Birth and death certificates thus mark with suggested precision the bookends of an individual's experience. Yet a variety of other documents and practices also matter to the legal and social imaginary of age and human life. "Coming of age" or the "Age of Consent" exemplify two specific legal fictions that compound questions of biological and/or social age while simultaneously demonstrating how legal discourse creates through description arbitrary, yet socially useful, categories of being. These collusions represent a few important instances. Cristina Peri Rossi in her book *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion] anticipates the theoretical delinking that occurs here by showing how young people understand themselves at the nexus of specific discourses that attempt to control any semblance of "free" output even in the very act of permitting exhibitions of their "rehabilitation."

Along with the definition of individuals by their western calendrical age comes the consideration of “age grading” as a related practice. To that end, it should be noted that even the “natural” practice of dividing students by age retains a specific social, economic and political history. Nancy Lesko notes that prior to the 1870s “it had been the norm for one-room schoolhouses, secondary academies, and even colleges to enroll students across a wide age range; it was common for academies (secondary schools) to have male students as young as 12 up through their early twenties” (Lesko *Act* 121). The author relates this increasing trend toward “age-graded” schools to “reform efforts of 1830 to 1850 ... [which led] toward a school that was increasingly a controlled environment for children and youth” (121). This led to two specific results. First, as Lesko writes, “statistical age based norms became the basis for bureaucratic practices” (122). As such, age provided a conceptual tool for census taking and in this way joined sex, race, and economic status as the basic descriptive tools with which state apparatuses came to describe and therefore define their populations. “Statistics” thus became a major component “of the technology of power in a modern state” (Lesko *Act* 122, see also Hacking’s “How should we do the history of statistics?” In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, & P. Miller (Eds.), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (pp. 181-196). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.). The second result of age classification involved the limiting of personal possibility based solely on age (Lesko, *Act!* 122). Here again Lesko cites Ian Hacking who writes that statistical based norms came to form the “classifications within which people must think of themselves and of the actions that are open to them” (Hacking 194 as cited in Lesko, *Act!* 122). Age classification thus came to

act as a horizon of expectation, determined not by individual capacity but rather by assumptions based on statistical averages.

In the literature I consider, age grading appears as asymmetrically significant. For example, in Castellanos' books, the girls' school and the indigenous children's school tends to educate children broadly against the older model. These schools make no specific designation by age and in some cases the teacher is barely older than the oldest student. Additionally, the teachers in these scenarios sometimes have problematic levels of education themselves, as is the case in Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians]. On the other end of the spectrum, age-graded schools are clearly the standard for the children of "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] and those in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. These divisions between the education in the end speak to the "quality" of the education, juxtaposing the poor rural schools with the elite suburb of Miraflores. At the same time, these contrasting models further the divisions between rich and poor, urban and rural, and boys' and girls' education.

In western society, age grading added efficiency to educational processes while also permitting and even mandating education to and for populations, generally the lower classes, that had never before received educational opportunities as such *en masse*. At the same time age-grading also emphasized the statistical anomalies residing at both ends of the spectrum, marking both the "precocious" and the "laggards" as deviants, in the strictest, statistical sense of the word (Lesko *Act* 121-122).⁵⁹ In normalizing education

⁵⁹ Lesko points to the statistical work of Leonard Ayres who published a crucial work entitled *Laggards in our Schools* in 1909. This text indicated that a key problem facing the U.S. school system involved the "overaged" students, "that is [students] not at the proper grade for their age", a population he calculated to comprise 33% of students (Ayres 1909 and Lesko *Act* 121). Ayres, as a result, "argued for greater educational efficiency and a curriculum more in line with average students" so that ultimately "proceeding through the grades ([and] not being held back) became normative" (121).

around a statistical center point, students were generally progressed through grades and instances of extreme precocity or laggardness became increasingly rare to the extent that while the early 19th century schoolroom accommodated individual programs fit to the specific talents and capabilities of the student by the late 19th century “four-year-olds were no longer allowed to enter elementary school, nor ten-year-olds were tolerated in high school” (121). To make matters worse for individuals at both ends of this spectrum, this understanding of an individual to be statistically deviant (so as to be classified as either a laggard or as precocious) occurred at a time when society viewed all forms of deviance with great skepticism and as relating to an individual’s particular inability. Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] focuses briefly on its protagonist’s early signs of precocity: Cuéllar outperforms his cohort in the classroom and on the soccer field. It is only following Cuéllar’s accidental castration that the boy begins to lag behind, intellectually as well as socially. Rather than correcting this as an educational issue, the society treats Cuéllar with an inappropriate series of rewards and punishments that I will discuss at depth in the next chapter. At the same time, given his educational experiences at both ends of this spectrum, Cuéllar’s experience within an age-graded system demonstrates the inflexibility of such a system and its inability to adapt to the special circumstances of a specific child or cohort.

Chapter Two – Concluding Thoughts

The classification of individuals into groups by age remains a standard practice throughout academia and other scientific and public discourses. Yet such processes are rarely understood as part of historical processes and specifically connected to the “steady production of knowledge in social sciences, medicine, education, and social work” in the

United States and Europe in the “middle to late 1800s and early 1900s” (Lesko “Denaturalizing” 141). Lesko warns that “to disavow the racist and classist attitudes of the new experts of the late 1800s but to continue to use their assumptions and conceptualizations, despite noble intentions, perpetuates their regime of truth” (141). Lesko points to Foucault’s ideas regarding the “regulation of behavior and knowledge construction” as elements of the modern state’s power apparatus (142). Therefore, the seemingly simple act of dividing children and adolescents into age-based groups already acts to separate and regulate their behavior while normalizing a system that does not necessarily benefit youth.

Rosario Castellanos’ *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] subtly critiques the lackluster education permitted girls in the regional schools. At the same time, her text anticipates the criticism of the educational system and its treatment of both types of statistical “deviants” in her description of the girls’ school in Comitán. Castellanos’ narrator describes the system and the way it comes to clash with the new Mexican educational goals. The unnamed girl describes

Nadie ha logrado descubrir qué grado cursa cada una de nosotras. Todas estamos revueltas aunque somos tan distintas. Hay niñas gordas que sientan en el último banco para comer sus cacahuates a escondidas. Hay niñas que pasan al pizarrón y multiplican un numero por otro. Hay niñas que solo levantan la mano para pedir permiso de ir al “común”
(Castellanos *Balún* 137-138)

[No one has ever been able to discover which grade each of us is in. Though we are very different, we are all jumbled together. There are fat girls who sit on the back bench so they can eat peanuts without being seen. There are girls who go to the blackboard and do multiplication and sums. There are girls who never do anything except raise their hands and ask if they can go to the lavatory (Castellanos *Nine* 16-17).]

This passage demonstrates an important interstitial moment undescribed by the educational theories but extant between the models of the one-room schoolhouse and the more contemporary, age-graded system. The narrator understands that some division exists but one that eludes discovery. Moreover, while the narrator is clearly precocious and able of making sharp observations, she understands that the educational system in which she initially finds herself progresses without a specific end date or exam to conclude a student's course of study. Immediately after the passage above, the narrator observes

Estas situaciones se prolongan durante años. Y de pronto, sin que ningún acontecimiento lo anuncie, se produce el milagro. Una de las niñas es llamada aparte y se le dice:

-Trae un pliego de papel catoncillo porque vas a dibujar el mapamundi. La niña regresa a su pupitre revestida de importancia, grave y responsable. Luego se afana con unos continentes más grandes que otros y mares que no tienen ni una ola. Después sus padres vienen por ella y se la llevan para siempre.

(Hay también niñas que no alcanzan jamás este termino maravilloso y vagan borrosamente como las almas en el limbo) (Castellanos *Balún* 138).

It goes on like that for years. Then suddenly, without warning, the miracle happens. A girl is called aside and told: ‘Buy yourself a sheet of cardboard. You’re going to draw a map of the world’.... Later her parents come to fetch her, and they take her away forever. Other girls never achieve this magnificent apotheosis, but drift about as dazed as homeless ghosts (Castellanos *Nine* 17).

In this passage, the text reveals how girls’ education would conclude without pomp but in a final project invented by the girls’ teacher that attempted to test the girls’ knowledge regarding the wider world into which they are about to disappear. This ceremony is a sort of rite of passage in and of itself in that it sets off the liminal space of education. At the same time, these girls fade into an unknown future no matter their intellectual preparation. In this project, the teacher repeats a rite with her “graduating” students that is entirely dependent upon familial priorities for the girls and not at all upon intellectual progress or the demonstrated attainment of any educational standards.

Youth develop within the context of local praxes that certainly impact their development and that delimit their social, intellectual, and professional potential. As I have shown in this chapter’s analysis of Ancient Greece and Colonial Lima, youth functions at a nexus established by and in relation to others with greater social, economic, and political power. These other social categories have long functioned to control and to

regulate youth social behavior. On the one hand, this dynamic suggests itself in the definition of young children's misbehavior as normal or representative of original sin. On the other, adolescent sexuality could be controlled through early marriage or the preoccupation of youth with other social and economic projects. Explaining behavior as resulting from such "natural" – or divine, which in this case can be read synonymously – causes permits a certain benevolence and grace on the part of adults while particular challenges such as resistance or precocity can be further ignored. Even as scientific thought perpetuates its myth of universality and unbiased/disembodied observation the close examination of its categorical creations, constructs such as gender, race, and (increasingly) age, thus ultimately prove useful to the broader project of pluralizing knowledge and reconsidering knowledge as result of local praxes of knowledge and thought construction. Though serious, the previous critique of scientific discourses thus attempts to pluralize knowledge by placing scientific and observation based knowledge in the context of its own creation and use. Examining praxes of knowledge will thus permit us to utilize functional categories and even statistical data thus permit a range of tools and approaches through which complex ideas, such as adolescence, may be approached.

Finally, the creation and deployment of young characters particularly in the liminal novels I examine demonstrates a similar expedient use of age as described by Premo in her analysis of historical situations. In these scenarios, characters' intellectual ability, their social and romantic development, and even their nascent sexuality provides a means through which literature attempts to create a specific relational context between the reader and the text. This chapter has worked to destabilize ideas of youth that reduce them to being "natural" and "extra-historical" entities by examining historical praxes that

contextualize such definitions and practices as part of political and social control mechanisms. In the following chapter, I will take this analysis a step further as I engage with my central texts and demonstrate how they further complicate ideas of youth as social phenomena.

Chapter Three

Navigating Matrices:

Fictional Youth and the Social Space of Flux

Following the introductory letter prefacing her book's titular story, Cristina Peri Rossi's "La rebelión de los niños" ["The Children's Rebellion"] introduces the story's narrator in the context of a subtle social tension depicted with exquisite precision by the text.¹ The story opens as framed by a narrative voice which defines itself in a series of tense oppositions found in the tale's initial paragraphs:

Nos conocimos por casualidad en una exposición de arte, en la planta baja del edificio. La exposición la organizaba el Centro de Expresión Infantil y allí estaban reunidos una serie de objetos experimentales, que habíamos realizado en nuestro tiempo libre o en las horas dedicadas a las tareas manuales, ya que, según las modernas teorías de Psicología Aplicada y de Recuperación por el Trabajo, nada era mejor para nosotros, ovejas descarriadas, que entregarnos de lleno a la tarea de expresarnos a través de la artesanía, la manufactura o el deporte. Para conferirle a todo el asunto un aire de espontaneidad más genuinos no se había hecho una selección previa del material sino que cada uno de nosotros pudo presentar lo que quiso, sin someterse a ningún requisito previo, salvo a aquellos que rigen

¹ Because Peri Rossi's final story grants her book its title, occasional confusion of the two entities may result. As a reminder, the italicized phrase (*La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion]) will always refer to the book as a whole while the title in quotation marks ("La rebelión de los niños" [The Children's Rebellion]) refers consistently to the book's final story.

para todas las actividades de la república, claro está, y que tienden a defendernos del caos, del desorden, de la subversión disimulados tras apariencias inofensivas, como sucede con el arte, por ejemplo, en que muchas veces, bajo el aspecto de la experimentación o libertad creadoras, se introduce solapadamente el germen de la destrucción familiar, del aniquilamiento institucional y la corrupción de la sociedad. Todo esto en un cuadro, solamente (Peri Rossi 107).

We met by chance at an art exhibit, on the ground floor of the building. The exhibit, organized by the Center for Juvenile Expression, consisted of a collection of experimental objects we had made in our free time or during craft sessions; according to the latest theories of Applied Psychology and Rehabilitation through Work, nothing is better for us lost sheep than devoting ourselves fully to self-expression through sports, handicrafts, or manual labor... To give the affair an atmosphere of genuine spontaneity, the pieces were not subjected to any kind of previous screening; each of us was allowed to present whatever we wanted and no conditions were imposed – except, of course, those governing any activity in the Republic, conditions intended to protect us from chaos, disorder, or subversion masquerading as something so apparently inoffensive as art, whereby, under the guides of experimentation or creative license, the

seeds of family break up, institutional degeneration, and social corruption are frequently sown. All that in only a single canvas.²

The narrating voice presented in this passage does not elaborate upon the ‘I’ (or ‘yo’ in Spanish) that speaks but rather it begins to unveil itself in a series of constant, if fraught, grammatical structures that subtly elaborate upon the deeply tense situation from which this voice speaks. The first such grammatical revelation comes from the employment of the Spanish past tenses to demonstrate a disjunction between the narrated time and the time of narration. The speaking narrator is then not taking us along as events unfold but rather relating past events. This further situates the narrator at a temporal interstitial point between the events and the reading of them. This dynamic leads to the second textual revelation in the positioning of this speaker in relation to a collective ‘we’ or ‘nosotros’, a group comprised of the larvate speaker and a yet to be identified person or group of persons. This initial collective participates in the exposition of art and as such specific inferences regarding the collective identity emerge. First of all, even if they are not ‘infantil’ [juvenile] or adolescents as a first reading suggests, they have been brought into the Centro de Expresión Infantil [Center for Juvenile Expression] for a specific purpose: to display artwork they created independently and in their free time as part of a program

² The majority of the stories from Cristina Peri Rossi’s *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children’s Rebellion] have yet to be translated into English. This story, however, has in fact been translated and an abridged version appears in Tobias Hecht’s *Minor Omissions: Children in Latin American History and Society*. Despite this fact, I have completed my own translation of this passage in order to emphasize particular word choices not made in the otherwise excellent translation. In particular, I find the translation of ‘Infantil’ as ‘youth’ too broad and lacking a crucial hierarchical element more readily present in either the word ‘infantile’ or ‘juvenile.’ I have selected the word juvenile due to its genealogical connections to mechanisms of surveillance and control which Michel Foucault analyzes as present in 19th century French prisons. As we will see in the following analysis a similar scenario of observation and control subtly but actively unveils itself over the course of this passage. Additionally, the selection of either ‘juvenile’ or ‘infantile’ as the name of the center aligns with the “homiletic” discourse which “captur[es] the mix of patriarchal preaching and scientific gospel found in much scientific discourse” (Lesko “Denaturalizing” 149).

aimed at their psychological ‘rehabilitation’ through physical work. Thus and secondly, they exist in a space of difficult social vulnerability highlighted by the appositive description of these characters as ‘ovjeas descarriadas’[‘lost sheep’] that may only be rectified through this final attempt at rehabilitation which brings together science (‘applied psychology’), art, the Catholic church, and the ever-present national State.³

As the text progresses, the initial and specific ‘we’ found at the beginning of the paragraph, the one capable of meeting and creating art and comprised potentially discernible individuals, fuses discursively to produce a more abstract and disembodied ‘we’ that only emerges towards the paragraph’s end. This later ‘us’ emerges from a textual wall in order to include the reader with the quick directed comment “claro está” (“except, of course”). This aside actively galvanizes the reader to a place of necessarily involved participation with the text. Particularly in the Spanish, this quick comment invites and almost demands that the reader respond with either a ‘yes, of course’ or a ‘no, not necessarily’ or, perhaps best of all, with a sympathetic eye roll acknowledging ‘yes, of course the state knows what is best’ while more subtly invoking a collegial, ironic refusal of this admitted truth.

This secondary ‘us’ [nos] is most fully elaborated when the narrator describes the limitations under which art may be created. This ‘us’, which we the reader are simultaneously asked to be part of and resistant to, stems from the Republic’s efforts to “defendernos del caos, del desorden, de la subversión disimulados tras apariencias inofensivas” (Peri Rossi 107) [‘protect us from chaos, disorder, or subversion masquerading as something so apparently inoffensive as art’]. Moreover, it asks us to

³ The text makes subtly yet manifest nods to these institutions in the naming of the theory, the center, and the youth’s vulnerable status.

consider the potential delinquency of the central narrating character who addresses us. While the story then seemingly develops along traditional lines – thanks to the fortuitous ‘meet cute’ alluded to in the opening line, an outspoken adolescent girl comes to be the target of another’s affections in the context of a heavily delimited setting: an art exhibition hosted at the bottom of a building and situated to highlight the youths’ reformation as expressed through their spontaneous artistic productions. This paragraph and the rest of Peri Rossi’s compelling story emphasize the vulnerability that envelops the budding relationship between the two protagonists. In this context, the characters’ ages and attendant liminal status thus situates them at a moment of decision, one that leaves a modicum of space that the artist can potentially exploit.⁴

Introduction

This chapter focuses on five works of fiction including Cristina Peri Rossi’s short stories that represent youth at the center of discursive processes. Along with the children and adolescents presented in Peri Rossi’s *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children’s Rebellion], in the following chapter we will consider the nameless girl narrator found in Rosario Castellanos’ *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians]; Pedro Bala, the defiant protagonist of Jorge Amado’s *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]; Ernesto,

⁴ This narrating character slowly reveals a few other aspects relating to its identity. The narrator’s biological sex along with its sexuality represent exactly two such specific, yet ultimately less significant, details. These matters as a means of identification or readerly orientation similar to the characters’ names, which are similarly never really given. It is interesting that Peri Rossi’s story eventually reveals its narrator to be biologically male while, because this revelation comes relatively late in the story and because the many pages that precede it treat the biological sex and the expressed sexuality of its main character with ambiguity, the work activates an audience’s interpretation of the text and the romantic desire that shapes the story as very plausibly defined by homosexual lust rather than the more commonplace heterosexual relationship eventually established. Given Peri Rossi’s own homosexuality and the openness of it in her writings, early readers familiar with her work could certainly have assumed these characters to be homosexual. At the same time, these questions do not matter as the text shows us all of these markers results from the state’s ‘redemptive’ programming, goals colluded with by the Catholic church, scientific discoveries and so forth.

the peripheral observer from José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers]; and Cuéllar, the victim of a brutal mauling who suffers from physical repercussions made worse by his community's treatment of him in Mario Vargas Llosa's novella, "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"]. Despite the centrality of these characters and their frequent use of a simplified tone, fiction often employs a certain amount of ambiguity around the identity of the youthful narrator such as that described above. While readers may initially attribute this ambiguous narrative fluidity to the emerging development a character based on its age, in specific texts such as those studied by this chapter, individual indeterminacy provides the literature an opportunity to explore identity as a liminal space bounded by socially inscribed limits. In the case of the 'children' that populate Cristina Peri Rossi's *Rebelión de los niños*, the purpose of the central ambiguity within a story of youth living and creating art under the regime serves to highlight the fact that the regime considers youth as already a period requiring "recuperación" or "rehabilitation" for future life and, particularly, for future compliance with the state. Peri Rossi's prose invites and maintains an uncomfortable distance between audience, narrator, and story such that when the children eventually come to burn down the museum the audience has no choice but to escape with them rather than remain trapped like many hapless spectators who assume, falsely as had the state, the impotence of the "children's" art.⁵

Adolescent liminality, for my purposes and as the following chapter will further show, engages with the personal and social spaces created within the assumption that adolescence "resembles 'an age', that is part of life conceived as an object" (Garcia 390). This necessarily includes, as the first chapter of this dissertation argued, a recognition of

⁵ Peri Rossi's "children's rebellion" will be discussed again and at length in the sections that follow.

the concept of liminality expresses a temporal phenomenon albeit through the use of spatial metaphors. Additionally, as the second chapter showed, examining representations of youthful liminality further requires a consideration the dominant social rules and norms that contextualize individual lives and events in order to examines bodily, mental, and spiritual events that impact the individual and mark its ability to interact within its own social matrix.

The following chapter furthers this exploration by approaching the liminal space from which fictional youth speak as it is shaped in relation to a tripartite series of textual perspectives. Read together these three perspectives – that of the textual and historical audience, the social matrix,⁶ and the central child or adolescent figure – demonstrate how these figures interact with the space in both its creation and elaboration. To that end, even as the texts I have selected do not require a shared national provenance for their understanding, they still each create such a space that may be approached through an analysis of these three, shared, components. Given the differences in terms of national origin, it is unlikely that the majority of these writers read any of the other works.⁷ As such, I carefully consider throughout this chapter the significant localized social and cultural dynamics with which each individual character must contend. Despite these important local differences, a close reading of fictional youths demonstrates the creation

⁶ This term will be much more completely discussed below, at present for our consideration a text's social matrix is the closed set of characters present with varied levels of explicitness within any given fictional text.

⁷ A major difference worth noting here involves the fact that Mario Vargas Llosa wrote critically about the writings of José María Arguedas and as such most certainly would have been aware of *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers]. Nonetheless, Llosa's novella is situated in Lima's famously posh Miraflores neighborhood in the late 1950s or early 1960s while Arguedas' sets his novel in the very small provincial town of Abancay, high in the Andean sierra. Thus, although these works share national provenance in fact the local differences and in particular the presence of significant indigenous topics in Arguedas' work functionally problematize the idea of a shared provenance.

of a locus of enunciation for adolescent and child characters at the intersection of the three perspectives noted above: that of the textual and historical audience,⁸ the fixed society created within the fiction (the ‘social matrix’), and the figure of youth itself such that the resulting space from which the figured youth speaks must be understood as always accommodating for the dynamic relational agreements guiding the relationship between the three figures. As we see from the discussion of the passage from the story “La rebelión de los niños,” [The Children’s Rebellion] recognizing this dynamic interchange permits a rereading of youth characters as liminal entities that move “in flux” relative to the details of their own particular circumstances.

In the following chapter, I examine this volatile tripartite relationship shared by the textual audience, the internally comprised social matrix, and the young protagonist by focusing first on each notion before putting them into an analytically productive conversation. To that end, I will first engage notion of the “competent” reader emerging primarily from Umberto Eco. This figure will subsequently be considered with respect to its “horizon of expectations”, a step that permits an important move of critical distancing that moves these texts away from an intertext defined by the Western *Bildungsroman*. This first section argues, instead, for the consideration of texts as heterogeneous and

⁸ It is functionally useful for us to read these perspectives together here but it should be noted that the textual and historical audience most certainly differ over time and thus an argument could be made for these two perspectives to be read separately. As a very brief example, we know that as a Peruvian literary critic and writer Mario Vargas Llosa read Arguedas’ work but as a reader he did not belong to the generation written about nor did he necessarily belong in the audience postulated by Arguedas’ text. As such and as I will show later, I use the idea of the ‘competent reader’ in order to analyze the textual situation of this perspective that makes space for necessary historical considerations as found in the text.

pluritopic entities that utilize a blend of major and minor modes in their elaboration of the competent reader.⁹

Following this consideration of the textual audience, my third chapter engages directly with the social matrices at work in each of the considered texts. This section focuses on limited textual communities in order to engaging with aesthetic representations of difficult social situations. I argue that the construction of the social matrices within these works produces sets of social rules that, in turn, produce scenarios of increased individual isolation. In this section, I engage directly with representations of parents and other adult or older guardian figures, the presence or absence of older adolescents and young adults as problematic models for imitation, and the generally less important but not wholly irrelevant presence of younger children in the development of the youthful protagonists.

The final section of this chapter engages directly with fictional youth as a particular locus of enunciation within fiction that is bounded by the textual audience, the social matrix, and a developing sense of individual interiority. This final section argues that young protagonists must create and consistently resituate themselves in relation to the audience's expectations and the not necessarily equivalent social requirements expected of them by their own social networks and matrices. While the young protagonist may or may not narrate their respective text or be the protagonist of their respective tale, their perspective still emerges as at the center of each of the works considered. This section additionally develops the idea that, in fiction, the "bodily events" (Garcia 390)

⁹ While this will be further developed below, the competent reader has already been suggested through the textual analysis performed above in the analysis of the passage from Cristina Peri Rossi. The competent reader is the one capable of understanding the subtle, multifaceted and far reaching criticism present in this work.

most often connected to the commencement of adolescence and puberty – a girl’s first menses, the development of secondary sexual characteristics – are almost always of secondary importance to the individual discoveries a character makes regarding the isolation produced by their social matrix and the way this dynamic will limit relational possibility. As we will see, these moments almost always involve the conscious awareness or recognition of particular socially-inscribed injustices. This section assesses the ability of particular young characters to acknowledge, understand, and respond to the presence of real and perceived injustices as produced by and extant in their own social spheres. Such an assessment thus further permits an understanding of the variable levels of agency retained by the disparate protagonists while also revealing how frustration functions as both a response of the young characters to adulthood and as a particular moment in their own “maturity.” Through this analysis, it becomes clear that the child’s nascent discovery regarding the independence of their own human experience does not immediately or even necessarily lead to any increase in the individual character’s own ability to interact freely within their social matrix but rather to a deeper understanding of their own difference from the other members of their immediate community. While for the very young acts or moments of resistance remain largely internal and personal rather than being particularly impactful phenomena, in contrast, adolescent characters often see resistance to the praxes and epistemologies of both adult and childhoods becomes a means of inhabiting and fashioning life within their liminal reality.¹⁰

A First Consideration: The Textual Audience

¹⁰ The dissertation’s fourth chapter removes the assumed temporariness of adolescence in order to engage with literary figures who either will not or cannot assimilate into functional adult lives.

As speech acts, texts such as Cristina Peri Rossi's "La rebelión de los niños" create through both implicit and explicit preposition, an audience capable of engaging with their specific subject matter. In the field of semiotics, Umberto Eco theorized that each text contains a textually inscribed "model reader" envisioned by the historical author as "supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them" (Eco 7). Eco's theory focused specifically on the role and imagined responsibility of this reader relative to two particular classes of texts: open and closed. Yet "at the minimal level" Eco's theory also acknowledged that "every type of text explicitly selects a very general model of possible reader the choice (i) of a specific linguistic code, (ii) of a certain literary style, and (iii) of specific specialization indices" (7). Thus, for example, by writing a fictional story in Spanish that nods towards the state ('la República'), science ('Psicología Aplicada'), and the Catholic church through its mention of 'lost sheep' ('ovejas descarriadas') would thus suggest a model reader with a specific set of interpretative skills through which they would be able to engage and thus interpret the text. Eco goes further noting that "at the same time [the] text... *creates* the competence of the Model Reader" through the activation of specific and often evolved "intertextual competence" (7). To further clarify then by returning to the example of the Cristina Peri Rossi's work above, this text creates through presupposition a reader capable of connecting ideas to a previously established intertext, perhaps either more general (fiction written in Spanish) or more specific (short stories produced in the Hispanic diaspora caused by the arrival of a dictatorship to Uruguay).

An important designation regarding the 'Model Reader' involves their distinct emergence in relation with "Closed" versus "Open" Texts. As Eco suggests, Closed Texts

involve “those texts that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less precise empirical readers” even if that group is too broadly imagined as consisting of anyone from “children to farmers, from ‘effete snobs’ to Presbyterians” (Eco 8).¹¹ Such works employ a sort of narrative tyranny that aims to control the readers’ interpretation. Closed texts then “presuppose an average reader resulting from a merely intuitive sociological speculation – in the same way in which an advertisement chooses its possible audience” (8). In contrast, Open Texts appear as “immoderately ‘open’ to every possible interpretation” and thus permit “the most unforeseeable interpretations, at least at the ideological level” (8). In contrast, “an Open Text outlines a ‘closed’ project of its Model Reader as a component of its structural strategy”, or more specifically, the Open Text employs a variety of discursive techniques that call attention to limitations that the previous form obfuscates. The texts considered by this dissertation permit this interpretative liberty but, through their aesthetic abstractions and discursive nuances, create scenarios that require the reader to develop interpretative competencies through the continued engagement with the text. More simply put, these texts teach the reader to read them while simultaneously attempting to do so without requiring one interpretative outcome. This is again evident in Cristina Peri Rossi’s writing as the competent textual reader is left by the story’s conclusion, the destruction of the event and the slaughter of its participants at the hands of the story’s protagonists, in the position to interpret these events based upon not only their violence but also as resulting from a reaction to life within the context of the authoritarian regime.

¹¹ One example of such a reading of this chapter’s texts certainly could include the national reading of these texts within the context of high school classrooms. This delimitation of a specific audience would also shrink the interpretive outcomes.

As we can see from the close reading of Peri Rossi and as Eco explains, “ideal” texts exhibit a series of discursive strategies that require the textual participation of both a Model Reader and the textual writer, not to be conflated with the narrator although these figures do sometimes come together.¹² Here, language, style, and jargon function as the general requirements suggesting a reader, while more specific strategies for the furthering of a text’s project exist such as the use of “personal pronouns (whether explicit or implicit)” in the suggestion of a dynamic relationship between textual reader and writer (Eco 11).¹³ “The intervention of a speaking subject” such as the textual author or another similar entity for Eco may then viewed as an example of a discursive activity “complementary to the activation of a Model Reader whose intellectual profile is determined only by the sort of interpretative operations he is supposed to perform” (11).¹⁴ According to Eco’s theory, individual instances of these strategies comprise nodes and an “ideal text” is that which incorporates a “system of [such] nodes or joints [in order to] establish at which of them the cooperation of the Model Reader is expected and elicited” (11). The Model Reader then is the person who is capable of accessing the most such nodes and joints and therefore capable of reading the ideal text on the highest number of levels. Returning to Peri Rossi, the nodes and joints are clearly represented in the triangulation of the Church, the State, and Art or at least of potentially achieving such a competency.

¹² Examples of this may be found even in moments of third person distant narration such as the , when the narrating ‘yo’ [I] disappears from José María Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers]. In these instances, a distanced third person narrator enacts the instructive discursive strategies of the textual author in the presentation of details important for this textually inscribed relationship of author to reader.

¹³ This use of the first-person narration in fiction, for example, is relatively common in fiction concerning youth. It permits a “direct” engagement between narrator and reader that impacts the reader’s analysis of the message, inviting questions to, for example, the narrator’s reliability and so forth.

¹⁴ Such an intervention is acknowledged in the “claro está” [‘except, of course’] which plays with exactly this sort of tension.

In the section that follows, I read the five works comprising this chapter's literary foundation as open texts based on their consistent galvanization of the reader's active participation. This, crucially, occurs while the texts also refrain from requiring the reader to reach a particular, textually predetermined, conclusion regarding the text and its characters. For example, in comparison with the other texts examined here, Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] enacts the most obviously pedantic project in that his conclusions and a great deal of the plot mandates a sympathetic reaction from the audience. However, as we will see below, reading this text in the context of other thematically comparable and more open texts permits a distinct approach relative to a more typical reading that would connect it to Amado's other early writings with their similarly latent ideological messages. Certainly, more basic interactions with the text are possible, a fact evidenced by the popularity of most of these texts as curriculum in the high schools of their respective originating countries.¹⁵ Yet, at the same time, these particular texts with their liminal characters and relatively clear 'horizons of expectations' such that the popular audience, a historical entity at times ignored for by the critic, can be included but without undue privilege.

Situating Youth in Relation to the Reader's Horizon of Expectations

A key dynamic that connects the textual reader to the characters, plot, aesthetics, and substantive themes presented in literature involves the localization of a particular text, such as Cristina Peri Rossi's book of short stories, relative to a particular intertext that is

¹⁵ Field research in Mexico, Peru, and Brazil allowed me to discuss these novels with literature and language faculty and students who studied these texts in their respective national settings. Given the fact that the novels are not necessarily widely known outside of their respective national settings other specific, non-anecdotal evidence for this claim is lacking. However, these novels are recognized in the context of their national canons as texts assigned regularly to high school aged students.

informed by other works of literature and fiction. In his 1969 essay, “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory,” Hans Robert Jauss challenged both the structuralist school’s and the Marxist school’s respective approaches to texts in order to approach precisely this textual dynamic. For the former, Jauss demonstrates a level of unease with the idea of the reader as an empty figure that at once lacked history, biography, and psychology but who also, and somewhat problematically retains a knowledge of history, one or more languages, and a sometimes explicitly invoked literary presence.¹⁶ At the same time, Jauss criticized the Marxists for focusing doggedly on a historical reader inextricably linked primarily to ideological and economic apparatuses and thus incapable of retaining other priorities. In his essay, Jauss argued that both schools ultimately underestimated the reader, ignoring her and her relationship to texts until philosophically expedient. He further contended that the elevation of the reader could open new or less considered avenues for textual consideration. For Jauss, the reader was not a passive canvas but rather an entity bearing a historically situated relationship to any given text.¹⁷

Jauss envisioned texts as happening in conjunction with both the author and the “reading public” and noted that these three elements interact dynamically. He explained the intermixed dynamic of these the tripartite interactions through his particular focus on one element – the reader – and showing how it interacts with both the work (text) and the author. Jauss writes

¹⁶ Nuance must be allowed for a variety of texts. Michel Foucault obliquely permits this in his essay “The Author Function.” Just as authors relate differently to particular rhetorical forms and at distinct historical moments so, one may surmise, readers also may relate distinctly to texts.

¹⁷ In fact, Jauss’ criticism establishes a middle ground between the structuralists’ general disregard for the historical circumstances of a work’s audience while also arguing against an oversimplification of these conditions that Jauss finds lamentably present in the “Orthodox Marxist” obsession with the audience’s “social position” or “place in society” (Jauss 7).

in the triangle of author, work and reading public the latter is no passive part, no chain of mere reactions, but even history-making energy. The historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its audience. For it is only through the process of its communication that the work reaches the changing horizon of experience in a continuity in which the continual change occurs from simple reception to critical understanding from passive to active reception, from recognized aesthetic norms to a new production which surpasses them (8).

One key result of engaging with the historical and cultural situation of the reader involves a further acknowledgment that this “relationship of literature and reader has aesthetic as well as historical implications” (8). To illustrate the aesthetic implications, Jauss notes that the reader brings to her first reading of a text “a test of its aesthetic value in comparison with works which he has already read” (8). Additionally, he writes that “the obvious historical implication of this is that the appreciation of the first reader will be continued and enriched through further ‘receptions’ from generation to generation; in this way, the historical significance of a work will be determined and its aesthetic value revealed” (8-9). Here again the concept of varied but linked ‘readings’ permits the resituating of the historical reader in relation to both a textual and an oral (or social) history of a text.¹⁸ For example, because Mario Vargas Llosa was born after José María Arguedas, Vargas Llosa retains a privileged vantage point in that he is capable of (re)evaluating Arguedas’ writings, a relationship that cannot be replicated in reverse.

If a text implies a reader, then the relationship between the text and the reader

¹⁸ In this way, the reader/listener of subsequent generations may sometimes interact or be exposed to a text and its own history.

must necessarily vary depending on whether the reader is assumed to possess any form of anteriority or whether he or she is theorized as having no prior relationship with literary works. Here while the latter scenario emerges as increasingly and laughingly absurd, the idea of this relationship between reader and text as existing in the context of previous relations merits further exploration as the reader's historical basis will certainly impact their interactions with the text. As Jauss argues

a literary work, even if it seems new, does not appear as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum, but predisposes its reader to a very definite type of reception by textual strategies overt and covert signals, familiar characteristics or implicit allusions. It awakens memories of the familiar, stirs particular emotions in the reader and with its "beginning" arouses expectations for the "middle and end," which can then be continued intact, changed, re-oriented or even ironically fulfilled in the course of reading according to certain rules of the genre or type of text" (Jauss 12).

The "rules" brought by the reader involve logical and emotional expectations that a text must acknowledge even if it does so in attempts to satirize, critique, or destroy previous expectations. Even those works attempting to revolutionize aesthetic demands must then employ textual strategies in order to situate themselves within a reader's "horizon of expectations" and acknowledge the prior existence of related to the one at hand, even if that relationship is dialectical. The texts considered by this chapter often engage the reader's horizon of expectations through the use of a limited first person narration that situates the reader in close proximity to the narrator so that the reader "follows" the

narrator's thinking, observations, and actions. This process becomes quickly complicated when this simple relationship exposes narrative "problems" such as the limitations of a young child's understanding. By beginning with a familiar relationship that between young child and older reader, texts such as Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] thus function to complicate orientation of reader to text.¹⁹

Two key outcomes emerge from engaging in readings as Jauss describes. First, the process through which new or innovative works emerge is elaborated as one "of continuous horizon setting and horizon changing" that "also determines the relation of the individual text to the succession of texts which form the genre" (Jauss 12-13). Major departures or new forms, such as the emergence of the modern novel and contemporaneous birth of fiction itself, as a result of this continual process. Jauss describes "the ideal cases of the objectivity of such literary frames of reference" as existing in works that "using the artistic standards of the reader, have been formed by conventions of genre, style or form" (13). Jauss then points to the example *par excellence* – Miguel de Cervantes' *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha* - as a text bearing both "critical purpose" and "poetic effect" pointing as it "foster[s] the expectations of the old tales of knighthood" while also and simultaneously parodying those expectations (13). This serious parody incorporates and then breaks down previous molds in order to give way to new horizon of possibilities for fiction. Subsequent works would then take *Don Quijote* as a paradigm-changing model. Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] similarly functions as a paradigm shifting text in its refusal to recognize a single protagonist, emphasizing instead the collective 'barrio' and the Cubs'

¹⁹ In the conclusion to this dissertation, we will see this destabilization taken to an extreme in the writings of Cesar Aira.

relation as contextualized therein.

The second major result of this dynamic interchange involves an interpretative element ignored by both the Structuralist and the Marxist critics of the time. According to Jauss' argument, acknowledging the existence of a dynamic interchange between text, reader, and author renders the "process of reception" (a process that a text undergoes over time) legible through the "expansion of a semiological procedure which arise between the development and the correction of the [literary aesthetic system]" (Jauss 12). This exchange invokes not only a work's literary predecessors, as described above, but also the admittedly less ideal "possibility that the reader of a new work [may] perceive it not only within the narrow horizon of his literary expectations but also within the wider horizon of his experience of life" (14). In claims such as that by Barthes stating the reader existed as "a man without history, without biography, without psychology" (Barthes 148), Jauss finds that "the predominantly social, or society-*forming* function of literature is missed" (32). In the idea of the "horizon of expectations", Jauss acknowledges an expansion of the aesthetics of reception to include both textual precedents and the importance of personal experience (14, see also 32-35). The historical situation of the reader bears highest importance in the final category of interpretation as it is the reader who must be understood as realizing "by the contrast between fiction and reality, between the poetic and the practical function of language" the fictionality of the work itself. Importantly, because most readers of youth will have their own experiences of youth, the texts in this chapter thus make extratextual connections that will evoke distinct, perhaps personal, reactions from the reader. Therefore, when reading about a young, precocious girl such as *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] narrator or a socially alienated

adolescent teenager such as Oscar Wao, readers can and will relate to these characters not only as artistic representations but also as historical and social entities that may appeal to particular personal ideas and/or memories possessed, perhaps, by the reader.

Assuming that each text operates at the nexus of a web of intertexts and that they will acknowledge and relate to a horizon of expectations as created by a reader's former engagement with the intertext, the reader's place in history, and his or her personal experiences begs the following questions: How do the texts selected for this chapter – works written in different historical moments from different geographical situations and even in distinct languages – establish and maneuver in relation to the reader's horizon of expectations? The answer here comes in three parts. First, all of the texts engage with encompassing traditions of literary realism in that they invoke traditions such that the aesthetics enact a function of social criticism. They are also connected to intertextual literary traditions concerning the development of the individual through childhood and adolescence, and thus cannot necessarily ignore the importance of the *Bildungsroman* even if these texts enact a distinct set of aesthetic projects.²⁰ Second, each text engages

²⁰ *Bildungsromane* and the liminal novels I consider here certainly share a preoccupation with young characters. The major irreducible distinction between *Bildungsroman* and the novels considered by this dissertation involves the ultimate purpose of the latter set of novels and thus the distinct horizon of expectations presented in the Latin American texts. In their establishment of individual standards of development guiding the individual's development of *Bildung*, or a world view, these books speak of those privileged by historical processes to lives that could "progress" and thus could only follow the "young man in his progress from boyhood to the threshold of a poised maturity" (Buckley 7). Even as feminist and postcolonial scholarship grappled with the place of women and nonwhite, nonmale, nonheterosexual characters that seem to replicate these teleological destinies, the texts considered in this chapter do not assume such assimilation will be possible for all or even any of their characters. Instead, the horizon of expectations enacted by these texts involves one of social fracture rather than any personal assimilation into a social cohesion. While outside the scope of this project, readers interested in how the *Bildungsroman* functions critically, albeit in a Western context, are encouraged to read Franco Moretti's crucial book *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. This book examines how Western *Bildungsromane* peddle images of a totalized life in order to provide the prevalent, capitalistic Western model of individuality the appearance of being "symbolically legitimate" (Moretti 16) As Moretti shows in his work, this symbolic legitimization finds fruition in the procurement of social stability rather than individual maturity, a concept Moretti finds troubling in the context of late capitalism. Neither achievement

critically and directly with traditional social structures however differently understood or experienced by the disparate societies. Moreover, all of these works concern post-colonial scenarios albeit with different levels of explicit attention paid to the historical conditions that inform the present scenarios. Third and finally, each work deals explicitly with value-setting social hierarchies grounded in Catholic beliefs regarding home, family, and state as described in the previous chapter. To this end, even though some works considered such as Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] attempt to portray a cosmopolitan and increasingly secular setting of 1960s Lima with its fast cars and loud cinemas and others such as Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* examine particular failures of both Catholic and indigenous belief systems, in effect they all emerge from a particular value system established in the Latin American region as part of its conquest and rule at the hands of the Spanish and Portuguese empires. As a result of these three elements, I suspect that the works this chapter considers – Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"], Cristina Peri Rossi's *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion], and Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]– elaborate their social matrices in ways that highlight social disjuncture and perpetual disharmony. In the context of this dynamic rather, this chapter's young protagonists' liminal perspectives as informed by their tenuous social positions permit a critique of relationally-inscribed rules that govern the interactions of a particular social matrix.

of either maturity or broad social stability act as objectives for the social matrices examined by this dissertation and as such even a critically nuanced concept of *Bildungsroman* proves itself less than useful in the consideration of this dissertation's texts.

A Second Consideration: Social Matrices

The opening scene of Jorge Amado's 1937 novel *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] opens with the image of a quiet, moonlight drenched night on a Brazilian beach, an abandoned warehouse standing derelict to one side. The beauty of this image quickly gives way to the grim reality as the perspective floats through the window to expose the dirty, jumbled bodies of boys the oldest of whom cannot be more than 16. The children's presence in this desolate and discarded setting that functions as the opening scene of Amado's novel, the last of the author's six "Bahian novels," a collection that depicts the social problems of the northeastern Brazilian state of Bahia, nods to a series of absences and failures: the children are defined as orphans either by parental deaths or familial abandonment; the Church with its emphasis on prescriptive morality described in the second chapter subsequently failed to provide a viable space to either protect and nurture these children; and, finally, the state too has either forsaken or has simply failed to acknowledge the phenomena leaving Bahia's young sleeping, abandoned, on the shore. The failures and abandonments that provide the subtext to this opening scene play out through the novel as the text depicts a Bahian social matrix peopled by characters that provide a face for these institutions and their critics. To that end, Amado's novel, like the other four texts under consideration in this chapter – José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], Cristina Peri Rossi's *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion], Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"], and Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] – foregrounds youth and the development of the self as occurring within the context of a social matrix that determines the potential and possibilities for the individuals that both comprise and exist within it.

Further examinations of youth as liminal subjects necessarily involve an analysis of these social grids and in particular the ways they come to define particular boundaries that demarcate the scope of possibilities in which the development of children and adolescent characters' selves may progress. The complex hierarchies found in each of the studied texts engages with institutional power particularly as found enacted by individuals that act as agents of the Church or the State as well as individual elites that benefit from the current social organization. In this context, age and biological or social relationship function as subtle but, at least in the context of our young protagonists, fundamental mechanisms through which children and adolescents begin to engage with their society, its disunities, and the way these will delimit their own social participation. For example, in *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], the scenes in the Abancay school permit Ernesto a chance to experiment with different social groups as he interacts with other boys his own age. He initially befriends Markask'a also called Candle [Spanish] but when his new friend agrees with the State's harsh punishment for participants in the indigenous uprising, Ernesto stops associating with him and chooses to spend more time on his own. The ensuing analysis of the texts' social matrices follows a pattern that could be viewed as hierarchical in that it focuses first on parents and teachers before moving to more laterally experienced relationships such as friend or peer-oriented interactions, the choice to examine parents involves an examination of the way the patriarchal hierarchy already exists as an unstable and destabilizing element for the parents, a dynamic we see most clearly in Cristina Peri Rossi's depiction of parents.

While clearly present in certain text's elaboration of social relationships, the idea of the "social matrix" actually appears in several distinct academic discourses ranging

from the fields of psychology to anthropology, sociology to political science. One shared aspect of the term involves the idea's discursive adoption sans genealogy and with problematically little by way of a critical definition. In the 1960s, when the idea came to be embraced more broadly in the fields of anthropology, the idea of the 'social matrix' permitted means of mapping the different social connections extant in small, communal settings. Such generally undefined uses of the term can still be found more recently. As a somewhat more current example of such usage, in his book describing the Santal peoples of India, Rudranand R. Thankur depicts the idea of the social matrix as "present[ing] a consolidated view of the solidarity and unity – organizational and ritual, in the midst of change and stress under the oncoming forces of modernization" (Thankur ix). One element of the 'social matrix model' that emerges clearly from this conceptualization involves the isolation of social unit from the external historical processes while still acknowledging the impact the latter idea – 'the oncoming forces of modernization' – on the former.

A unified genealogy of the 'social matrix' evades possibility on the one hand due to the fact that different fields employ the term without attribution or definition and on the other as genealogies, generally, show how "unified origins" are impossible. It is this search then not for origin but for early potentialities that takes us to one of the earliest published works that deploys the term, Jürgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson's *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (1951). In this book, the writers attempt to find common ground between the social sciences including psychiatry and the life or biological sciences via a consideration of the way social relationship and communications frame interactions and contextualize "the individual within the framework of a social

situation” (Ruesch and Bateson 3). For these writers then, the ‘social matrix’ “facilitate[s] the consideration of an event, first within the narrower context of an individual organism and then within the framework of a larger societal system” in which the doctor and patient both exist (4). This system thus permits an exploration of events and occurrences that impact direct relationships but also the broader system of relationships impacted by the event under consideration. These social relationships act as “smaller system[s that are] part of the larger system” and that, in turn, impact knowledge and understanding such that the “conclusions drawn within this smaller system”, i.e. the relation between doctor and patient, “may become inaccurate or even invalid when seen in the framework of the wider over-all system” (4). Additionally, and although these analysts avoid reaching such a conclusion, it certainly stands to reason that the opposite may also be true in that a general agreement found throughout a social matrix can be negated at sub-matrix levels. For example, in the social matrices presented by Rosario Castellanos in her books *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] and *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]²¹ the broader social matrix of the southern Mexican state of Chiapas supports a system in which “white”, landowning, *ladino* males dominate society. At the same time, individual relations and particularly those between women, for example between *ladina* daughter and *mestiza* or indigenous nanny, often demonstrate a deeper intimacy and sense of connection. *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] and *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] both take time to develop these relationships between characters, yet the books do so while also condemning these characters to the replication of the hierarchical

²¹ As a reminder, this title represents the only English language translation of Castellanos’ book, *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]. I discussed the problems with this title previously. See footnote 1 in this project’s introduction.

system so that, even if the relationship could lead to a more cohesive and inclusive system, this is never the goal.

Somewhat more recent social systems theories also informed by anthropological work have utilized the idea of the social matrix in order emphasize the range and variety of interchanges extant within a particular social system. Clifford Geertz, for example, writes that the idea of the social matrix illustrates “the involved system of cross-cutting, overlapping, highly corporate groups – villages, kingroups, irrigation societies, temple congregations, ‘castes’ – in which its devotees live” (Geertz 436). Acknowledging this social system as a matrix then permits the consideration of a wide variety of relationships that may, in turn, evolve over time. As Mark Turner writes, the social matrix may be “manifold, multivariate, and nonlinear” (Turner 37). Relationships within such a system will range from dependency, such as that of the very young child upon the parent, to complex economic and social interchanges. The emphasis on social exchanges does not necessarily override the importance of traditional connections formed by familial linkages and social (or legal) contracts that legitimate sexual relations and the creation of families, both in the nuclear and extended sense, but rather creates a means through which the economic changes wrought by broader international trends may be navigated as well. Rosario Castellanos’ *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] represents such a complex interchange in the episode when Zoraida Argüellos buys and then, at the demand of her husband, must return handcrafted jewelry to Doña Pastora. The text emphasizes Zoraida’s profound discomfort when the exchange reverses course from being a simple commercial act that would have allowed her to perform her own class-based social superiority to recognizing her economic and social powerlessness in the

returning of the goods. This reversal humiliates Zoraida while it also seems to embolden a vague smugness from Doña Pastora.

The following analysis explores how literary works create social units that function as social matrices. To this end, three particular reasons explain the appropriateness of this tool. First, emphasizing the matrix rather than another model (such as the network or web)²² evades the problematically anachronistic application of social network ideas to places and social groups prior to the globalizing economic and technological advances of the 1980s and 90s. Secondly, the examination of the matrix permits a reading of the texts' closed social units as all of them contain a limited number of characters and social relationships.²³ Thirdly, while economic interchanges exist (for example most of the children and adolescents rely on their parents' incomes) this exists without the commodification or monetizing of these relationships. Here the matrix permits us to examine these relationships apart from technological apparatuses used to leverage social relations and that would, again, appear anachronistic in the context of almost all the literature and film under consideration in this dissertation.²⁴

As we find in the literature, an important additional consideration connected to the utilization of the social matrix involves its appropriateness as a means of considering how power becomes diffuse throughout the social system through the application of

²² Social network theory generally takes claims at being “non reductionist” and while this perhaps functions well for ever expanding networks of people it does not map usefully to the concepts and generally established characters found in a closed system of, say, a text (Kadushian).

²³ Here again this use is appropriate in this context and should not be applied to all literature. Rather, certain works of literature speak of an expansive social milieu rather than a limited social setting.

²⁴ Two outliers here come from the dissertation's final chapter and include *Sin nombre* [Nameless] which was produced in 2009 and which appears to tell a contemporary story regarding the characters' flight to the United States. Also, the narrative frame at work in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* never clarifies exactly when the narrator speaks but the vast majority of the activity takes place in the early 1980s, ie avoiding the networking of relations that resulted from Globalization.

system of punishments and rewards. To this end, the social matrix may be viewed as a generally self-controlling and self-disciplining unit that functions more broadly as a regulatory force... [since] there are certain actions which evoke public disapproval. Sometimes this disapproval is so strong that it takes the shape of social boycott. The offender is often ostracized from community” (Thankur 106).

Anthropologists focus often how such extreme repercussions are often reserved for equally extreme offenses, often related to things understood as ‘taboos’ by the community. To that end, Thankur examines, in particular, two sexual offenses: incest and sex with an outsider. Literary works including the ones examined below show how these responses are scaled relative to specific social deviations. In Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] for example, this punishment system expands over the course of the novella such that initial ambivalence enacted toward Cuéllar following his brutal accidental castration ultimately fails as his behavior begins to deteriorate following the accident and as a direct result of the way the matrix treats him. In this situation, a feedback loop emerges as Cuéllar’s parents and the rest of his immediate society in Lima attempt to control his behavior through a system of rewards and punishments. Cuéllar’s parents, for example attempt to encourage “good” behavior and “proper” social conduct when they give him a series of cars. On the other hand, the other “Cachorros” [cubs] consistently punish him as they exclude him with increasing regularity throughout the last four chapters of the novel.²⁵ As another example, *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers’]

²⁵ While dealing with a new situation unaccounted for in traditional social behavior, Cuéllar’s parents and the other members of this social matrix behave in ways that have ritual significance. They create a taboo by evading mention of his accidental castration, therefore its avoidance functions as a negative rite in van

Father Linares beats Ernesto for participating in a local uprising before later taking him to redistribute salt to the *hacienda* workers, a series of actions clearly aimed educating Ernesto to the prevalent social hierarchy and their shared position of privilege relative to the dominated indigenous workers. These examples of how actors within the social matrix may disseminate its values, ideals, and norms through both positive and negative reinforcements including through the permission or exclusion of the individual's participation in social rites and ceremonies. As we will see, one common dynamic shared by these texts involves their critical presentation of such moments of positive reinforcement.

If the *Bildungsroman* posits cohesive society as a future objective the idea of the social matrix and its presence in the texts demonstrates how non-cohesive “cross-cutting, overlapping, highly corporate groups”, or social sets with distinct objectives, may be approached without reducing disunities into a *telos* of progress.²⁶ To that end, the following questions permit textual explorations that focus on the agents of the social matrix, in particular parents, priests, and teachers, before examining the locus of youth permitted by the texts. In the process, I explore the following questions: how are to social matrices of each text organized and why? What if any relational claims do these fictional matrices make to broader society? What, if any, are the explicit and/or implicit aims of these matrices? What, if any, sub-matrix organizations are important? To this end, what are the primary relationships and how do they give shape to the social matrix and submatrix? How do particular formal choices, such as the employment of a first versus a

Gennep's schema. On the other hand, the gifts function as positive and direct rites in that they seek a certain outcome. See Chapter One.

²⁶ More on this question of *telos* will be explored in my dissertation's fourth chapter.

third person narrator, function in our ability to approach particular social matrices?

Finally, how do systems of punishment and reward function to communicate the respective matrix's norms, ideals, and objectives? How do these texts situate young characters to respond in particular, preconfigured manners? Do these processes ever privilege young people? And, if so, how?

Negotiating Terms of Survival: The Role of Family Units in Relation to the Social Matrix

In the literature considered here, families occupy a crucial role between the individual and the broader social matrix. Focusing on the situation of family units thus permits a direct engagement with the social matrices represented in each work of literature studied in this chapter. In all five of these works, family acts in the reader's horizon of expectations as a submatrix unit that connects the youth to the broader social matrix, a situation it occupies through the utilization of a system of punishments and rewards. To this end, even though immediate, biologically-related families do not necessarily have to function as a text's central submatrix - for example in "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] the group of boys clearly represents the central, submatrix unit - it most certainly can take on this function. Such is the case of Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] in its depiction of a small family comprised of two parents – César and Zoraida Argüellos, their son, Mario, and their daughter, who narrates the majority of the text and yet who the text never takes the trouble to name.²⁷ The family unit here also expands slightly over the course of the novel to include César's cousins and a nephew, the illegitimate son of César's deceased brother.²⁸

²⁷ This family is small by mid-century Mexican standards and the inability of Zoraida to bear additional children is commented upon briefly in the text.

²⁸ Of the texts under consideration, only *Balún Canán* presents an extended family as important to the novel's protagonist. The extended family unit, much like the nuclear family, revolves around Cesar Argüellos and his relations with only brief mentions of Zoraida's mother. Cesar's cousins, although generally older than the Argüellos children, occupy a uniquely tenuous relationship to the Argüellos family. The narrator describes meeting them during her family's journey to their hacienda in Chactajal when the family stops at the cousins' farm in Palo María. Much like the relationship, the girl describes the bizarre sisters with great clarity.

Palo María [es] una finca ganadera que pertenece a las primas hermanas de mi padre. Son tres: tía Romelia, la separada, que se encierra en su cuarto cada vez que tiene jaqueca, Tía Matilde, soltera, que se ruboriza cuando saluda. Y tía Francisca (Castellanos 188).

[Palo María is a cattle farm that belongs to my father's cousins. The three sisters are: Aunt Romelia who is separated from her husband and who closes herself up in her room when she gets a migraine; Aunt Matilde, a spinster, who blushes when greeted, and Aunt Francisca.]

While the Argüellos family shares a traditional, biologically determined bond, the text highlights the family's economic and social status. In several sections told from Zoraida's perspective, for example, the character considers her economic and social powerlessness. She frequently ruminates on the family's inability to buy a nicer house or other such concrete items and how this inability marks the Argüellos family's social decay, a common obsession early in the novel that perhaps underscores her increased separation from that family as the story unfolds.

Zoraida represents one of the only mothers significantly present in any of these texts, and her laments serve to clearly mark the character's bitter disappointment with a situation that educated her with punishments and rewards but that failed to deliver upon that agreement. Several passages from the novel's second and third sections reveal Zoraida's personal history and particularly focus on the poverty that contextualized her youth, a fact represented by her lack of shoes.²⁹ Although barely depicted in the text, it is obvious that Zoraida's childhood prepared her for either a spinsterhood, or worse, defined by enduring poverty such as that maintained by her friend Amalia or for salvation through marriage to a wealthier man. Although the novel never makes explicit Zoraida a specific age, it makes evident the fact that she married a significantly older César Argüellos at a relatively young age to escape her family's poverty. While this choice seemingly suited Zoraida in the beginning - ("Cuando César se fijó en mí y habló con mamá porque tenía buenas intenciones vi el cielo abierto" (Castellanos *Balún* 209) ["When César noticed me and spoke to mama because he had good intentions, I saw heaven opening before me" (Castellanos *Nine* 89)] she comments – she eventually comes

²⁹ Shoes as a status symbol emerge as a common division marking the truly poor in *Balún Canán*, *Os capitães da areia*, and *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers].

to an awareness regarding the volatility of even this seemingly stable arrangement (Castellanos 209; *Nine* 89). Zoraida remains either unable or unwilling to assimilate the realities of this situation and her own agency within it. On the one hand, Zoraida remarks upon her mother's unhappiness with the situation, commenting that "siempre se afligia [mi madre] de verme como gallina comprada" (Castellanos *Balún* 208) ["it always hurt [my mother] to see me like a hen bought at the market" (Castellanos *Nine* 89)]. Yet on the other hand she never chooses to assimilate within the Argüellos family either, choosing instead to cede particular responsibilities such as managing the household keys to César's cousin Matilde when the family travels to the Argüellos hacienda of Chactajal.

Zoraida inhabits her own liminal space of "humildad" ['humility, humbleness'] that permits the examination of virtues within the context of the social matrix. As a virtue, 'humildad' suggests itself as a model behavior to be actively sought for deployment in a person's life. This particular virtue is often linked explicitly to the lives of those living in deep poverty to the extent that 'humildad' sometimes can be used synonymously with poverty. As a virtue, 'humildad' is extolled by the Church while the political and familial ramifications of submissiveness permits the governability of individuals who recognize themselves in a relatively low social space. Zoraida's "humildad" defines her interactions with the social matrix. As a "humble" or extremely poor child she aspired to little more than owning an appropriate pair of shoes. Her marriage brings her new humility in the shame of her husband's romantic dalliances but also in her own inability to bear additional children. As the social rules shift beneath her feet, she clings to this virtue and in her attempts to save Mario's life in the novel's last few chapters, she throws herself at the mercy of the priest, who actively dislikes her; her

single friend, who judges her; and a medical doctor, whose advice she ultimately chooses to ignore. In short, she fully realizes her humbled situation in an, ultimately unsuccessful, effort to save her son.

Zoraida's actions represent an occupation of permanent liminality that I discuss further in my final chapter. In Zoraida's behavior like Idolina's paralysis, both characters reject any possibility of forging alliances with any of the other groups or figures in their immediate society.³⁰ One particular scene hints at the possibility for such cooperation and how the individual behavior of a character dispenses with any such potential. In a particularly telling episode from the novel's second section, Zoraida and César's cousin, Matilde, take the narrator and her brother Mario to swim in a river near their hacienda, Chactajal. At one point, young indigenous children jump into the water nearby, an affront to the traditional separation maintained in bathing which was seen as a private activity. In response,

Zoraida se detuvo.

- ¿Qué dicen? – preguntó.
- Quién sabe. Están hablando en su lengua.
- No. Fíjate bien. Es una palabra en español.
- Qué nos importa, Zoraida. Vámonos. Mira hasta dónde van ya los niños.

Zoraida se desprendió con violencia de las manos de Matilde.

- Regresa tú si quieres.

³⁰ This permanent occupation of liminal spaces is found throughout Castellanos work. In *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] Idolina's paralysis, for example, certainly represents such a permanent occupation. The fourth chapter examines this dynamic of 'permanent liminality' to much greater extent.

Matilde bajó las manos con un gesto de resignación. Zoraida había desandado el camino para oír mejor.

- ¿Ya entendiste lo que están gritando?

La intensidad de la atención le crispaba los músculos de la cara. Matilde hizo un ademán de negación y de indiferencia.

- Gritan “camarada”. Oye. Y lo gritan en español.

Matilde esperaba la explosión de cólera, por lo demás ya tan conocida, de Zoraida. Pero en vez de eso **Zoraida curvó los labios en una sonrisa suave, indulgente, cómplice.** Y ya no hubo necesidad de insistir para que regresaran. Echó a andar con prontitud, la cabeza baja, la mirada fija en el suelo. No habló más. Pero cuando llegaron a la casa grande y vio a César recostado en la hamaca del corredor empezó a gritar como si un mal espíritu la atormentara:

- ¡Estaban desnudos! ¡Los indios estaban desnudos! (Castellanos *Balún* 257-258).

[“Zoraida stopped.

‘What are they saying?’ she asked.

‘Who knows. They’re speaking in their own language.

‘No. Listen. It’s a Spanish word.’”

‘What is it to us, Zoraida. Let’s go. Look how far ahead the children are already.’”

Zoraida freed herself violently from Matilde’s hands.

‘Go back if you want to.’

Matilde dropped her hands in surrender. Zoraida had returned along the to hear better.

‘Now do you know what they’re screaming?’

The intensity of Zoraida’s concentration tightened her face muscles.

Matilde shrugged to indicate that she didn’t know and didn’t care.

‘Comrade’ they’re calling. Listen. And they’re crying it in Spanish.

Matilde was waiting for that explosion of bad temper which by now she

expected from Zoraida. **Zoraida curved her lips a smile, gentle,**

indulgent, complicit. Now there was no need to insist now that they

should go back. She set out at once, her head bent and her eyes fixed on the

ground. She didn’t speak again, but when they reached the big house and

she saw César lying in his hammock on the veranda she began screaming

as if an evil spirit had seized her:

“They were naked. The Indians were naked. (Castellanos *Book* 144-145).]

This brief episode marks a moment of possible collusion not entirely dissimilar to the potential found in the relationship shared by the girl and her Nana which will be discussed in the next section. In this episode, for the first time in the novel, Zoraida does not resist hearing, seeing, or occupying the same place as indigenous people, whose company she actively avoided, derided, or accepted as only a necessary nuisance until this precise moment. Instead, she acknowledges the words spoken in her language by indigenous people in her proximity and even smiles, acknowledging a connection, however brief,

between the boys' lower social status and her own shaky social status. Instead of pursuing that connection as a means of liberation from César as his cousin Francisca had already done to the mortification of her family, Zoraida chooses to reject any future unity and instead chooses to lie explicitly about the Indians being naked, a fact that the text had already explicitly made clear.³¹

While their changing economic circumstances alienate Zoraida and thus threaten the family's stability, the national political changes depicted in *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] paradoxically consolidate the family. The few scenes that find the adults and children together and conversing almost all deal with the parents' preoccupation regarding new policies requiring that they offer the indigenous workers on their family plantation a school for their children. To this end, the family possesses an objective distinct from that of the broader social matrix with which it is bound: the family attempts to survive, physically in several instances, while also maintaining their traditional status as local elites and through the performance of traditional rites and customs. César's actions best represent this blind adherence to tradition as he often makes situationally ridiculous decisions, such as appointing his barely literate, horribly insecure nephew as teacher for the indigenous children based on out-of-date ideas regarding the demands of the indigenous people. The text explains his character, noting that

César no era de los hombres que se desarraigan. Desde donde hubiera ido, siempre encontraría el camino de regreso. Y donde estuviera siempre sería el mismo. El conocimiento de la grandeza del mundo no disminuía el

³¹ "Los indios, uno por uno, iban despojándose de la camisa, de los caites. Con el pantalón de manta bien ceñido se movieron hasta el agua" (Castellanos *Balún* 148) [One by one the Indian boys took off their shirts and sandals. With their homespun trousers well rolled up they went into the water (Castellanos *Nine* 143-144).]

sentido de su propia importancia. Pero, naturalmente, prefería vivir donde los demás compartían su opinión; donde llamarse Arguello no era una forma de ser anónimo; donde su fortuna era igual o mayor a la que de los otros.

César wasn't a rolling stone. Wherever he might wander, he would always find his way home. And wherever he went, he'd always be the same. He might get to know the world, but that fact could never lessen his sense of self-importance. Of course he preferred to live where others shared his opinion, where to call oneself Argüellos was not a way of becoming anonymous, where his fortune was equal to or greater than those about him.

Inflexibly set in his character, César clearly emerges, at least in his own perspective as the only entity capable of providing structure and stability to his surroundings. The fact that this may have been true for previous generations and that the political bodies will support his claims of authority and power ultimately propel him from Comitán to seek out authorities who will agree with him in the state capital of Tuxtla Gutiérrez. This journey demonstrates the character's absolute certainty regarding his privilege and that a greater authority that can only be found elsewhere will vindicate his belief in this system. His journey thus takes him away from Comitán, out of the novel, even as his son Mario dies at home.

Like *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] also focuses initially on a family unit, yet this time the family's

vulnerability emerges immediately. The most obvious yet implicit reason for this instability involves the fact that the death of Ernesto's mother, an event that occurred well in advance of the novel's events, left him partially orphaned. Extended family will not provide assistance and in fact threaten to further perpetuate the surviving family member's potential for social stability. The book's first chapter, "El Viejo" [The Old Man], focuses specifically and attentively to the construction of a tripartite social matrix generated by the relationships of three characters: Ernesto, the sixteen-year-old narrator; his father; and "el viejo" [The Old Man], a family relative of imprecise familial connection. The text clearly establishes a fraught relationship between the father and "el Viejo", opening with Ernesto's depiction of him

Infundía respeto, a pesar de su anticuada y sucia apariencia. Las personas principales del Cuzco lo saludaban seriamente. Llevaba siempre un bastón con puño de oro; su sombrero, de angosta ala, le daba un poco de sombra sobre la frente. Era incómodo acompañarlo, porque se arrodillaba frente a todas las Iglesias y capillas y se quitaba el sombrero en forma llamativa cuando saludaba a los frailes (Arguedas *Ríos* 7).

[He inspired respect, in spite of his old-fashioned and dirty appearance. The important people of Cuzco greeted him courteously. He always carried a gold-headed cane; his wide-brimmed hat cast a slight shadow on his forehead. It was uncomfortable to go out with him, because he knelt down before all the churches and chapels and ostentatiously took off his hat to every priest he met (Arguedas *Deep* 3).]

The text highlights an anachronism in ‘El Viejo’s’ [The Old Man’s] behavior not dissimilar to that of César Argüellos in that both older men behave as though time has not changed the political and social landscape with which they interact. An additional layer of complexity emerges in this reading as it focuses not on the explicit political policies such as those that benefitted César but rather the Church and the way it sustained the patriarchal system for land and labor distributions that promulgated the great disparities between Peru’s ruling elites and its, largely indigenous and mestizo, working populations.³²

As the previous paragraph shows, family provides an important social submatrix yet the plot of Arguedas’ novel ultimately situates family as one of several possible but fraught options as potential for stability. Other options for Ernesto include the school as comprised by students, teachers, families, and workers; the group of boys he associates with in the school; and the broader indigenous community of Abancay, the city in which Ernesto resides after his father leaves on another errant professional mission. Both the first and second groups end up merely replicating, albeit with minor distinctions, the social hierarchy found throughout Peru in which the wealthy collude with the church to propagate their continued social dominance, often at the expense of the poorest: the indigenous, Peruvians of African descent, and the infirm.³³ At the same time, the text

³² The Church is relegated to the periphery conspicuously in Castellanos’ novel as Zoraida reluctantly fulfills ceremonial duties and only seeks out the priest’s assistance in the direst of circumstances as she faces her son’s potential death. In both books, the attitude individuals of individuals – namely Zoraida and “el viejo” [the Old Man] – towards the church thus seem to matter much more than their particular theological praxes.

³³ The novel makes mention of the boys’ regular gang rape of “la Opa”, a mentally incompetent woman living and working in the school who also seems to be ‘malusada’ [misused] sexually by at least one of the priests. This further illustrates, albeit subtly, the breakdown of the cohesive Tawatinsuyu systems of labor and justice in which all people received protection and labor as their physical capabilities permitted. To the latter, a woman with la Opa’s condition would have been given an appropriate job in Tawatinsuyu while, in

alludes consistently to the potential for an indigenous uprising as a potentially ‘natural’ phenomenon similar to the outbreak of the disease that brings about the novel’s inconclusive conclusion. Rather than working as representative microcosms, these small submatrices show how maintaining hierarchical structures that require the subordination of individuals or groups welcomes an internal violence that will always threaten stability, at either the local or national level.

A set of indistinguishable bourgeois families act as an important if not crucial in Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [The Cubs]. Although the reader is made to understand the elite economic and social status of the Miraflores community, the families achieve little distinction as repetitive separate units that are permitted minor variations. While the title ‘cachorros’ subtly refers to this repetition with minor variation in its connotation of generations, Vargas Llosa’s prose establishes this dynamic in an atmosphere of choral tension with the juxtaposition of phrases highlighting a grammatical ‘us’ [nos/otros] and them [ellos].³⁴ This aesthetic fragmentation creates a choral narrative that simultaneously constituted and constituting so hostile towards individual differentiation that a tragic accident, the castration of one of the indistinguishable ‘pups’, emerges as a particular threat to be overcome. This matrix maintains the subtle yet

the context of the Inca justice system, rape led to a punishment of death. An additional important conclusion involves the fact that Arguedas is not writing about Tawantinsuyu but of problematic issues and situations extant in the 20th century. The timeliness of his work is generally overlooked in the criticism of Arguedas’ writings.

³⁴ The title “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] invites a moment of scrutiny as the text never internally employs the word. In Spanish, the word refers most often to the young offspring of animals, primarily the dog (“puppy”), but also to lions and bears. This explains the use of “cubs” in the translated title. However, the word carries an additional valence in Spanish as its secondary meaning, according to the Real Academia Española [The Royal Spanish Academy] defines “cachorro” as a “Miembro de las generaciones jóvenes dispuestas a suceder a las anteriores en un ámbito determinado” [Member of the younger generations disposed to following the earlier generations in a defined environment]. Given the theme and development of this story, it is crucial to recall this second definition that clearly shapes the behavior of several generations of Limeñans.

ultimately violent mission of incorporating Cuéllar via previously established norms no matter the cost to his family or himself. This is evidenced in the various attempts by the “Pups” and their female friends to incorporate Cuellar into their activities – going to the movies, spending time together, going to restaurants – but only if he will behave exactly as his non-injured friends do. The few instances in which Cuellar attempts such behavior ultimately lead him to further social isolation as his sexual inabilities make his attempts at even non-sexual romantic interactions meaningless, at least in the world of this text.

In the final two texts, Peri Rossi’s book of short stories and Amado’s *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands], families are either entirely missing or represent a problematic link between individual youths or a collective youth subset. To that end, while Peri Rossi occasionally presents parents and family units they are almost always already in a state of decay: the very first story finds a father attempting to feed his pre-verbal, toddler daughter as they both reflect on their shared abandonment by the girl’s mother, a shared abandonment but one that leaves the girl a partial orphan and that does not function to bring this unit together but rather contextualizes this dinnertime standoff. On the other hand, Amado’s work like Arguedas’ highlights social failures and parental absences previously explained. In approaching the groups of youth found in Amado, Arguedas, and Vargas Llosa we thus get a picture of stable families that are always elsewhere: lost to the violence, plagues and politics of history in Amado’s Bahia, displaced out of economic necessity in Arguedas, and erased in their frantic repetition of sameness in Vargas Llosa. A closer examination of the individual actors and agents of the matrix reveals how individuals come to police youth in the maintenance of these already unstable matrices and their tenuous claims to social importance.

Directly engaging with the family as a submatrix unit permits the young protagonist and, by extension, the reader a means of entry through which the broader, textually contained, social matrix may be engaged. To this end, individuals such as mothers, fathers, and teachers may function as agents of the matrix in that they communicate the social norms and objectives for the unit. The following section examines these characters in order to show how agents of the matrix engage with and propagate these values. Of the questions remaining for consideration, this section addresses specifically the function of parents and teachers as agents of the partially social matrix, however disdainful they react to this position. This section also looks at how the presence or absence of these adults shape the social matrix.

Parents and Teachers: Agents of Perpetuation

Given the importance of family units even in their absence, it is not surprising that parents or parental surrogates, figures such as teachers or priests, provide crucial characters who also contend with the flux of the social matrix. While some variation exists in these works all five of this chapter's central texts present adults as synonymous to parents or nurturing social figures such as a nanny, a priest, or a teacher. Traditionally in texts concerning youth, the primary role of adults and particularly of nurturing figures such as parents or teachers involves the establishment and instruction of the young person relative to the social norms that they will eventually be required to meet. In relation to both the reader and in the context of the unsteady social matrices examined here, it thus stands to reason that adults and nurturing figures will provide a certain element of structure to stories. As we will see shortly, adult figures in the novels considered below do not convey or communicate desired normative behaviors uncritically but rather

frequently note their own dissatisfaction, frustration, confusion, or even ambivalence even as they interact with their own children or young charges.³⁵

Even when told from the first-person perspective of the children and youth, each fiction considered makes an effort to present the existence of an adult interiority sometimes inaccessible to the individual text's protagonists. Adult goals and frustrations in these novels emerge in the context of their relationships with the youth as well as with other older characters. For the most part, central adults in these texts recognize a general frustration with social norms yet a close reading of these characters also conveys the hopelessness regarding intergenerational collaboration in resisting their further implementation.

Although not fully elaborated, the first chapter of Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] elaborates Ernesto's father's frustrations regarding 'el Viejo's' [the Old Man's] lack of support. Ernesto presents his father's perspective on the situation in a somewhat more removed manner, even when describing particularities of his father's behavior and perception that impact him directly. For example, in describing his father's relationship with "el Viejo" [the Old Man], Ernesto notes

Mi padre lo odiaba. Había trabajado como escribiente en las haciendas del viejo: "Desde las cumbres grita, con voz de condenado, advirtiéndole a sus indios que él está en todas partes. Almacena las frutas de las huertas, y las deja pudrir; cree que valen muy poco para traerlas a vender al Cuzco o llevarlas a Abancay y que cuestan demasiado para dejárselas a los colonos. ¡Irán al infierno!", decía de él mi padre (Arguedas *Ríos* 7).

³⁵ This, again, departs from the trajectory of the *Bildungsroman* in which adults generally function as either positive or negative models rather than as ambivalent agents such as those we find in these works.

[My father hated him. He had worked as a clerk on the Old Man's haciendas. "From the mountain peaks, he screams with the voice of a condemned person, warning his Indians that he is everywhere. He collects the fruits from the gardens and lets them rot; he believes that little value would come of selling them in Cuzco or taking them to Abancay but that it also costs too much to give them to the *colonos* [workers on the hacienda]. He'll go to hell!" my father used to say. (Arguedas *Deep* 3).]

The chapter thus opens with an elaboration of two, similar perspectives regarding "El Viejo" [the Old Man]: the first paragraph communicates Ernesto's opinion and the second his father's. The similarities between these two opinions is evident and may certainly be read as a child's unthinking agreement with the parent regarding a disliked third party. However, a crucial aspect here involves the father's decision to seek his relative out in search of assistance with "un extraño proyecto concibió por mi padre" [a strange project conceived of by my father] (7). Ernesto's remark demonstrates a general but incomplete understanding of his father's plan. The following two chapters go on to depict the relationship between father and son as marked by Ernesto's nostalgia and longing for a connection despite his father's negligence. This dynamic is already found in the first chapter as Ernesto excitedly walks Cuzco's streets, hoping to see Inca ghosts and spots made sacred both by history and his father's retelling of the stories of Cuzco. In contrast, Ernesto's father distractedly hurries his son along as he attempts to complete his poorly defined economic mission.

Unlike other characters such as the parents included in Peri Rossi's stories, Ernesto's father's frustration never appears to directly linked to his son nor does

Ernesto's father seem to seek out a situation that would permit them to live together, an attitude that perhaps reflects the lack of such options in Peru at the time. Instead, at least from Ernesto's perspective his father was simply "un abogado de provincias, inestable y errante" [a provincial lawyer, unstable and nomadic] (Arguedas 35).³⁶ Despite their long journeys across southern Peru, the relationship never deepens beyond the possibility presented by first chapter. Even "La Despedida" [The Farewell] which gives title to the novel's third chapter is handled in a detached manner: the father deciding "con ademán aparentemente más enérgico que otras veces, que nuestro peregrinaje terminaría en Abancay" [with a resolve more energetic than other times, that our pilgrimage would end in Abancay] (47), apparently so that the father may establish a law practice in the village. This plan also comes to naught and in shortly more than a week the father leaves again after depositing Ernesto at a school overseen by a much-lauded local priest, Father Linares.

Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] divides its narrative into three parts: the novel's first and third parts narrated by the young, unnamed Argüellos daughter while the interpolated second section closely follows the perspectives and actions of the novel's adults.³⁷ At the same time, because of the employment of a young

³⁶ The father's absence is explained by the economic necessity of this endless pursuit of jobs that seem to always be elsewhere. In this sense, Ernesto's father demonstrates how adulthood does not promise stability even with the proper education, social status, and appearance (the book takes pains to mention the father's good looks). This nods to the proliferation of thresholds that will be discussed further in this dissertation's fourth chapter as well as the conclusion.

³⁷ Two chapters fall outside of this setup for reasons that merit exploration. Chapter 13 of the novel's first section relates an exchange between the narrator's father and his illegitimate nephew, Ernesto, in which the uncle enlists his nephew's assistance as a teacher for the school he must provide his indigenous, ranch workers. This despite the fact that Ernesto only complete four years of school himself. The narration employs a close third person omniscient narration in the consideration of these characters and makes no explanation for the girl narrator's relatively inconspicuous absence. The other differentiated chapter occurs late in the second section and tells of the burning of the *hacienda*. This chapter employs a more epic voice in its depiction of an event which progresses from an unknown but suspected cause and which will change the destinies of both the Argüellos family and the indigenous workers.

narrator, *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] sketches out a social matrix in which the patriarchs come into view as perceived through the perspective of youth. In her narrator's descriptions of herself and her family, the novel's unnamed protagonist invokes both the physical and socioeconomic power differential that undermines social cohesion already in the most fundamental of family levels: the family.

Soy una niña y tengo siete años. Los cinco dedos de la mano derecha y dos de la izquierda. Y cuando me yergo puedo mirar de frente las rodillas de mi padre. Más arriba no. Me imagino que sigue creciendo como un árbol y que en su rama más alta esta agazapado un tigre diminuto. Mi madre es diferente. Sobre su pelo-tan negro, tan espeso, tan crespo- pasan los pájaros y les gusta y se quedan. Me lo imagino nada más. **Nunca lo he visto. Miro lo que está a mi nivel...** a mi hermano lo miro de arriba abajo. Porque nació después de mí y, cuando nació, yo ya sabía muchas cosas que ahora le explico minuciosamente. Por ejemplo ésta: Colón descubrió América (9, emphasis my own).

[I am a girl and I am seven years old. Five fingers on the right hand and two on the left. When I straighten up I can see the front of my father's knees. Higher, no. I imagine that he keeps growing like a tree and on his highest branch crouches a tiny tiger. My mother is different. Over her hair, so dark, so thick, so curly, birds fly and they like it so they remain. I can imagine it and nothing more. I've never seen it. I see what is at my level... my brother I can see from top to bottom. Because he was born after me and when he

was born I already knew many things that I explain to him meticulously.

For example: Christopher Columbus discovered America.]

The girl understands the physical differentiation between the adults and herself as indicative of an important intellectual distinction as well: she cannot see her parents entirely and thus cannot know them but must rely on her imagination to guide her knowledge. In this way, this girl and Arguedas' Ernesto both rely on their creativity to bridge the gap of actual connection and knowledge of their parents. Despite this initial reliance on creativity to bridge gaps of knowledge, *Balún Canán*'s young narrator in fact possesses an acute perception of the world around her, even if her ability to understand the things she observes remains somewhat limited due to her age. The girl perceives, for example, her Nana's smallest emotional shifts. Additionally, when the girl's teacher receives news regarding the educational reforms to be enacted in Comitán, she perspicaciously observes the entrance of an unknown woman who comes to speak with the teacher and whose news leaves the teacher shaken. While the girl cannot hear the content of the conversation she notes clearly that the teacher "parecía más y más inquieta" [seemed more and more distressed as the conversation went on]. As this passage illustrates, although the girl is not immediately aware of the nature of the news, she repeatedly proves herself a keen and critical observer of adult life, an awareness in part granted her by peripheral position as an observer of adult behavior.³⁸

³⁸ While the narrator eventually learns the additional information initially denied her, her ignorance comes from both not being the original destination of this news and also due to the fact that she has yet to experience the major changes regarding education in her provincial hometown of Comitán. At the same time a less excusable oversight occurs in her parents' lack of acknowledging the paradox found in the fact that this new policy shuttered the girls' decrepit but functional school while facilitating the opening of another school under the direction of an emotionally unbalanced, alcoholic teenager with a fourth grade education. Instead, the parents and their acquaintances complain bitterly about the new mandate while entirely ignoring the fact that the girls' school has been closed even as this closure most certainly accounted for the girl spending additional time at home and thus in the family's presence.

The generally simple and straightforward "feel" to the narration found in *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] belies a highly fragmented narrative that includes significant narrative ruptures, such as the entire second section, and the inclusion of choral perspectives from the Argüellos adults. Read closely therefore Castellanos' employment of a fragmentary voice aligns more closely with that which is utilized in Mario Vargas Llosa's novella "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"], albeit with significantly less abstraction even if it is rather unlikely that Mario Vargas Llosa would have read Castellanos. Much like Vargas Llosa's novella, published less than a decade later and which he claims to have rewritten "at least a dozen" times prior the mid-1960s, Castellanos' story examines questions of belonging and relationships but as part of a markedly broken social matrix. From its opening lines, Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" [The Cubs] systematically complicates the precise identification or location of its text's speakers. The work opens with the descriptive sentences "Todavía llevaban pantalón corto ese año, aún no fumábamos, entre todos los deportes preferían el fútbol y estábamos aprendiendo a correr olas" (Vargas Llosa "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] 105) ["They were still wearing short pants that year, we weren't smoking yet, they preferred soccer to all the other sports and we were learning to surf" (Vargas Llosa "Cubs" 1)].³⁹ This phrasing leads the reader to identify the existence of two specific groups: an "ellos" or a "them" and a "nosotros" or an "us." At this point and in direct contrast with traditional narrative patterns that build stories

³⁹ Just a brief note regarding the title of Vargas Llosa's tale. The title "Los cachorros" invites a moment of scrutiny as the word never comes up in the text. In Spanish, the word refers most often to the young offspring of animals, primarily the dog ("puppy"), but also to lions and bears. This explains the use of "cubs" in the translated title. However, the word carries an additional valence in Spanish as its secondary meaning, according to the Real Academia Española [The Royal Spanish Academy] defines "cachorro" as a "Miembro de las generaciones jóvenes dispuestas a suceder a las anteriores en un ámbito determinado" [Member of the younger generations disposed to falling the earlier generations in a defined environment]. Given the theme and development of this story, it is crucial to recall this secondary definition as the text clearly employs both meanings in its description of the generations of Lima's young elites.

and dramatic tension from the distance between these two established groups, Vargas Llosa's prose deviates sharply from the standard pattern to highlight the tenuousness of relationships and group belonging. An additional third person omniscient voice adds to the syntactic complexity while enacting a stabilizing function that balances the prose in its more matter-of-fact descriptions of important and particular events that prompt the development of this story as belonging to all of its protagonists, the titular "Cachorros" [Cubs] and Cuéllar, the unfortunate victim of a tragic accident that leaves him castrated at a young age.

Because of its syntax and narrative style, locating the voice, motives, and desires of any particular individual becomes increasingly frustrating and unimportant as the tale progresses. On the one hand this effect results from the time the story concerns itself with: unlike most of the other texts examined in this chapter, "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] relates the story of a cohort of youths living in Lima, Peru's elite Miraflores neighborhood from their primary school days until a hazy point in their mid-adulthood. The "cachorros" as a group thus progress from interacting primarily among themselves with their parents occupying nebulous spots in the background in the novella's first chapters, with each other and their female romantic and sexual interests in the middle chapters, before they fade into a similar formless indistinctness with their own families at the end. Nonetheless, due to the extreme nature of Cuéllar's accident, the early and middle chapters certainly involve adult reactions that demonstrate their frustration with a world that cannot accommodate Cuéllar. These reactions vary from his parent's entreaty that Cuéllar lie about the location and thereby the extent of the injury "era un secreto, su viejo no quería, tampoco su vieja, que nadie supiera, mi cholo, mejor no digas nada, para

qué, había sido en la pierna nomás, corazón ¿ya?” (Vargas Llosa “Cubs” 110-111) [“it was a secret, his old man didn’t want, neither did his mom, anybody to know, my boy, better if you don’t say anything, what for?, it had only been on the leg, sweetie okay] to his teachers’ beginning to spoil him, a pattern of behavior towards Cuéllar that comes to be repeated by seemingly all of the adults in his life despite its clearly detrimental effects. Despite the ubiquity of adults, no actual guardian emerges to create a path or to stabilize Cuéllar’s behavior.

While most of these texts situate themselves as critical of broad social problems, “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] departs from this scenario, at least initially, by foregrounding its social challenge in the extreme accident and the matrix’s initial reactions to it. In contrast to the other texts then, the cause of the initial misfortune could be easily identified and eradicated.⁴⁰ Yet the story does not end there as its adults, although less present as the tale progresses, start slightly altering the rules of the conservative social matrix they inhabit as a result of the accident. Cuéllar’s parents initially and repeatedly attempt to seek solutions for their son, looking to medical assistance for their son far from Lima in Europe and the United States. At the same time, this social unit as a whole begins to treat Cuéllar with extreme indulgence – changing the rules and providing him endless gifts. Cuéllar was “the first of the five to have ice skates, a bicycle, a motorcycle” and an increasingly fast set of cars, one of which he fatally crashes. The text thus presents Cuéllar’s parents and the Cachorros desperately attempting bribery, coaxing, and punishment via isolation or other denials in order to

⁴⁰ In fact, “Los cachorros” never relates exactly what happens to Judas, the dog, but rather has Cuéllar commenting that he was “sure that his hold man came and killed him, he always did what he promised he’d do. Because one morning the cage was empty at daybreak and a week later, in place of Judas, four white bunnies” (Vargas Llosa “The Cubs” 9).

manipulate Cuéllar's behavior. The tragedy then emerges from the inadequacy of these methods as Cuéllar often aspires to 'correct' his behavior only to experience isolation and rejection based on his sexual disability. In this way, Cuéllar represents the failure of a punishment system as he lives with social rejection and isolation based solely on a childhood accident, the scars of which he carries no matter the medicinal or social advances made by his community.

Punishments and rewards are found throughout most of the stories that constitute Cristina Peri Rossi's *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion] as they present intergenerational conflict dividing parent and child. At the same time, these stories frequently deviate creatively from the mundane repetition of the traditional theme by showing how, in fact, the adults and children react, strongly yet distinctly, to common sources of frustration. Peri Rossi's text thus presents shared social space as a constantly in flux intellectual distance between people whose individual desires may sometimes diverge. The book's first story "Ulva Lactuca" clearly establishes the disputed space as one capable of permitting and even requiring dynamic exchanges.⁴¹ This story, like most of the others, uses a variable third person voice that frustrates general attempts to demarcate precisely narrative shifts from the tale's two perspectives: the first belonging to a pre-verbal girl and the second to her father who attempts to feed her with a spoon from a bowl. The girl refuses and the text presents her simple reason in its first lines "Ella miró la cuchara con aversión. Era una cuchara de metal, oscura, con una pequeña filigrana en el borde y de sabor áspero (Peri Rossi 5)" [She looked at the spoon with aversion. It was a metal spoon, dark, with a small filigree on the edge and with a rough

⁴¹ *Ulva lactuca* is the Latin word for the plant more commonly known in English as sea lettuce ("Sea Lettuce").

taste.] Although growing increasingly impatient through the tale, the father attempts to cajole his daughter into eating, his methods ranging from pleading to putting the food in a different bowl. The father's frustration at first appears to be a direct response to his daughter's stubborn resistance to eat. With time, however, a deeper cause emerges as "*Ulva Lactuca*" ultimately reveals itself to be a story about a familial "Catástrofe: un suceso desgraciado que produce grave trastorno" [Catastrophe: a wretched event that leads to a great disruption"] (Peri Rossi 9). The central event that preoccupies the father's mind and that also occasionally emerges as part of the daughter's thinking involves the mother's recent abandonment of the family but the thoughts themselves tumble between the father's attempts to feed the girl, his obsession with the mother's abandonment and the girl's actions.

Finally, a quick note should be made regarding the lack of parents and the residual presence of parental heritages in Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]. This novel presents the "captains" as either orphaned by the death of one or both of their parents or as abandoned children. The lack of parents contributes to the youths' isolation and their experiences of loneliness which Amado explicitly discusses at various points throughout the novel and, in this way, the text faults the breakdown of families, by death or by choice, implicitly with the criminal activities engaged in by the captains. The captains themselves use this extremely precarious position in order to curry favor and to swindle their way into homes and houses. In a particularly telling chapter entitled "Canção de amor da vitalina" [The Spinster's Love Song], Gato [Cat] and Sem-Pernas [Legless] con their way into a supposedly wealthy spinster's home based on her pity for the latter's physical deformity and the fact that he is

um pobre orfão e aleijado” (Amado *Capitães* 237) [a poor crippled orphan (Amado *Captains* 227)]. In fact the only time the book makes use of the term orphan comes in passages told from the boys’ perspectives and when they attempt to use this status as “poor orphan” to their advantage. In the case of Sem-Pernas [Legless], however, rather than protecting him, the spinster takes advantage of the boy’s social isolation and physical vulnerability, forcing him into her bed for sex. Sem-Pernas’ [Legless’] orphanhood thus represents an isolation compounded by his physical incapacity that is brought much more fully to his consideration through this episode. In the face of the complexities of this state of orphanhood, other guardian figures arise including a Catholic priest, a Candomblé priestess, and a Capoeira teacher yet they too fail fill this void nor do they receive much, if any, social support regarding their attempts to assist the Captains.

The Guardians: Nanas, Priests, and Priestesses

Besides parents whose presence and centrality these texts do not assume, most of these texts also present a set of additional characters that function as guardians of a sort. These characters are principally ‘Nanas’ [nannies], teachers, and priests, that assist young characters to interact with the broader social matrix. Particularly in the situation of orphans, these figures generally act within the reader’s horizon of expectations as sources of guidance and support to their young charges. This dynamic shared to certain extents by most of the texts permits an analysis of the relationships between such adults and their young charges or acquaintances. Additionally, a focus on these characters reveals these characters own expectations regarding their socially inscribed relationships and the way these, sometimes peripheral characters, relate their young charges to the social matrix.

In the first and third sections of *Balún Canán*, the narrator relates frequently to her guardian, her indigenous Nana. In fact, it is only after the Nana predicts Mario's ensuing death that the girl comes to spend any significant time with her mother. On the surface, the Argüellos family's arrangement in having an indigenous caretaker is hardly noteworthy as an elite family living in Chiapas most certainly would have employed such assistance. Even in the fictionalization of this process, the text represents indigenous labor as easily and painlessly found in that the Nana is quickly replaced by two indigenous women following her hasty 'despedida' [dismissal]. Nonetheless, the Nana and her charge have several discussions through which the latter comes to learn about indigenous cosmology and the broader social structure she and the Nana cohabitate. The Nana at one point admits to her charge that living with the Argüellos family has isolated her from the indigenous community which sees her as too closely aligned with the "ladinos" (Castellanos *Balún* 140; *Nine* 18-20). Nana explains her situation to her young charge in the novel's fourth chapter when a group of indigenous workers arrive from the Argüellos family's hacienda in distant Chactajal.

Son cosas de las brujas, niña. Se lo comen todo. Las cosechas, la paz de las familias, la salud de las gentes.... Mira lo que me están haciendo a mí.

Y alzándose el tzec, la nana me muestra una llaga rosada, tierna, que le desfigura la rodilla.

Yo la miro con los ojos grandes de sorpresa.

No digas nada, niña. Me vine de Chactajal para que no me siguieran. Pero su maleficio alcanza lejos.

¿Por qué te hacen daño?

Porque he sido crianza de tu casa. Porque quiero a tus padres y a Mario y a ti.

¿Es malo querernos?

Es malo querer a los que mandan, a los que poseen. Así dice la ley

(Castellanos 140).

[‘It’s the doing of witches, child. They devour everything. Fields, the peace of families, people’s health... look what they are doing to me.’

And raising her tzec nana shows me a pink ulcer that disfigures her knee.

I look at it, my eyes wide with surprise.

‘Don’t say anything, child. I came away from Chactajal so they would not follow me. But curses reach a long way.’

‘Why are they hurting you?’

‘Because I was brought up in your house. Because I love your parents, and Mario, and you.’

‘Is it bad to love us?’

‘It’s bad to love those that give orders, those who own things. That’s what the law says (Castellanos *Nine* 18).

In this section, the Nana explains to her young charge the central conflict that makes progress impossible: simply put progress, freedom, diversity and cooperation – fundamental liberal ideals found in the social contract are not the goal of the law within which they live. Loving those who give commands or who own things, as her final lines

state, is now against the law and so mutual cooperation cannot be the goal of the social matrix, at least at present. This reality in combination with the Nana's insistence on telling Zoraida about the fate coming to Mario ultimately leads to the Nana's dismissal from the family's employ. By the end of the novel, with her mother distraught and nana absent, the girl remains fully abandoned by the social matrix. It is in this moment of abandonment, however, that the girl discovers an agency and ability to occupy that space and making it her own. In this case then, the self develops despite the lacuna created by an absence of social options.⁴²

Finally, although absent from the novel's conclusion, the girl's Nana leaves a lasting impression on the girl as she gently instructs her ward to examine carefully her circumstances, a process that activates an inchoate empathy or at the very least a keen awareness of the injustices her family advances through its commitment to traditional behaviors and social structures. In her addresses, like in the considerations of Jorge Amado's priest, Padre José Pedro, the law and the moral imperative operate distinctly resulting in the fact that the characters' own life must be lived somewhere in between. This distance is profound in Castellanos' texts, however, as none of them suggest a possible, amicable cohabitation as remembered but not immediately presented in José María Arguedas' writings. Arguedas' Ernesto emotes a strong nostalgia for the Quechua-speaking community of his earlier years as it provided him love and guardianship now so wholly absent in his life of quasi-orphanhood. At the same time, neither *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] nor *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] deal in the idealistic

⁴² As we saw previously in the introduction to this dissertation, Castellanos returned to this same theme later in her book *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] in which the idea of a community and the particular idea of disunity between women of distinct races, classes, and languages receives further attention.

images attributed to mid-century *indigenismo* movements and the conclusions of both novels in fact testify to the significant challenges for any form of cohesive life, at least under the current regime. The employment of these important nurturing characters serve as faulty and unsure conduits between the individual and their matrix thus, again, reveals the generally unstable nature of the matrix.

Los ríos profundos [Deep Rivers'] first three chapters transfer Ernesto from one tripartite social matrix to another: the former, discussed above, is shaped by Ernesto's father, "el viejo", and Ernesto himself, while the latter replaces "el Viejo" with a seemingly kinder figure: the friar Padre Linares, who comes to act as a patriarchal figure in both the context of Ernesto's boarding school and in the broader Abancay society.⁴³ Given the displacement of families discussed above, Father Linares and the other priests serve the boys, at times, in the place of actual family. Initially this change appears positive. Ernesto admires the priest and quickly gains friends, or at least acquaintances, at the school. However, the social situation deteriorates in the boarding school, the village, and the surrounding region, rather quickly. Rather than accepting Father Linares' authority without question, when an indigenous uprising breaks out, Ernesto finds a place for himself, at least temporarily, outside the school and by connection to the Quechua speaking local community. He leaves the male's only school and joins a group of indigenous women who revolt against the rising prices of salt. In this action, there are

⁴³ The second triangle therefore involves Ernesto, his father, and the priest. While the father eventually leaves, parental absence does not fully negate his import to Ernesto in fact this absence permits Ernesto a more complete experience of orphanhood, even if his father remains alive his status of being somewhere else requires Ernesto to function as an abandoned boy, a requirement shared by many of the school's other students.

echoes to his father's critical position but on moral and ethical terms rather than as a result of the economic necessity that seems to drive Ernesto's father's every choice.

Although Arguedas' novel takes umbrage with Father Linares behavior towards his indigenous parishioners, it only rarely focuses directly on his interactions with Ernesto. When it does, this relationship and in particular Father Linares behavior exhibits how church agents, a group to which he certainly belongs, establish the law through the system of punishments and rewards analyzed above. One important interaction occurs when Ernesto engages in act of epistemic violence by joining with the mestiza *chiceras*⁴⁴ in their protests against the government monopoly of salt. In this episode, Father Linares' reaction demonstrates his complete certainty about the inappropriateness of Ernesto's participation in the protest. To correct this behavior, Father Linares punishes Ernesto by beating him and then requiring him to assist the priest in his visit to a hacienda on which many of the protestors work. Following a lengthy sermon that leaves his Quechua-speaking parishioners in tears the priest gives the indigenous workers several bags of salt, an act which strikes Ernesto as ironic given that it was the same salt "stolen" by the same people a day prior. This episode then elaborates upon a series of punishments - physical (the beating), social (the required subservience in the ceremony), and epistemological (the resituation of Ernesto as part of a preserved ethnic elite). In his enacting these punishments with such certainty, Father Linares demonstrates an unwavering certainty regarding the appropriateness of the message he communicates that contrasts distinctly with the unfaltering ambivalence experienced by Jorge Amado's Padre José Pedro.

⁴⁴ Women who sell *chicha*, a traditional Andean drink made from fermented corn.

In “Quebrada honda” [Deep Canyons], the novel’s chapter depicting the consequences of the *chiceras*’ “motín” [uprising], the text highlights the deep disparities between the treatment of different racial groups in Peru and the involvement of the church in the continuation of the disparity.⁴⁵ The chapter opens with Father Linares beating Ernesto and explaining to his young ward that doing so is “mi deber sagrado [porque] has seguido a la indiada confundida por el demonio” [my sacred duty [because you] have followed the indigenous mob that was confused by the devil] (Arguedas 155). In this utterance, the Priest’s duty then coincides with the state’s mission regarding the suppression of the uprising even as Ernesto continues to question the State, and therefore also the Church’s idea of right and wrong in this matter. Throughout this beating and in its aftermath, the priest repeatedly sides himself with Ernesto, assuming a relation to Ernesto and a distance from “la indiada” [the indigenous mob] despite Ernesto’s own protests that he too participated in the liberation of the salt. Although Ernesto repeatedly asserts his participation and therefore his guilt by association, neither the priest nor the hacienda foreman with whom Ernesto later discusses the uprising ever respond to his assertions, ignoring his comments in order to maintain their understanding of Ernesto as “one of them” rather than as something else, which his participation in the uprising begins to clarify.

Additionally, and as mentioned in the first chapter of this project, this chapter of Arguedas’ book articulates a three-part system of creative power quite clearly. Ernesto receives a punishment that is physical as well as spiritual, noting that “el castigo y los rezos me habían empequeñecidos” [the punishment and the prayers had made me feel

⁴⁵ This exploration of the social fissure is certainly already foregrounded in the chapter’s title.

small] (Arguedas *Los ríos* 296). The hacienda's indigenous workers also receive a spiritual and verbal chastisement that leaves many of them weeping openly. At the same time, this second punishment elaborated by the chapter also demonstrates a moment of reward when the priest returns the very same salt "stolen" the previous day and thus shows how benevolence may also function as a positive praxis of power. Finally, the third punishment mentioned by the chapter comes when the hacienda's "mayordomo" [overseer] returns Ernesto to the school, an act that also marks the removal of Ernesto's independence as he previously travelled freely. In this short journey, the overseer informs Ernest that the militia will execute Doña Felipa, the leader of the uprising, "por escarmiento" [as a deterrent] (163-164).⁴⁶ Ernesto reacts strongly to this word, ("¿Escarmiento? Era una palabra antigua, oída desde mi niñez en los pueblos chicos. Enfriaba la sangre." (164) [A deterrent? It was an old word I had heard in small towns since my childhood. It chilled the blood]. This chapter thus opens with punishments, elaborates a system of chastisements and rewards and continues along the idea of such "deterrents" as used to separate classes: Ernesto had also been punished, yet his privileged social position permits him the dignity of a private punishment. Thinking through the physical pain, Ernesto astutely recognizes in the beating a moment that actually serves to link him to the indigenous community. In contrast, the state attempts to

⁴⁶ The Royal Academy of Spanish defines escarmiento as "Castigo, multa o pena que se impone a alguien" [Punishment, fine, or sentence imposed on someone] (RAE "escarmiento"). The verb ("escarmentar") from which the noun derives is defined with three definitions. Firstly, the Royal Academy of Spanish defines escarmentar signifies to "aprender de la experiencia propia o ajena para evitar caer en los mismo errores" [to learn from one's own experience, or others', in order to avoid the same errors] (RAE "escarmentar"). The second definition involves punishment, "imponer o aplicar un castigo a alguien, o corregirlo con rigor por haber cometido una falta" [to impose or to apply a punishment on someone, or to correct them severely for having committed an error] (RAE "escarmentar"). The final and least damaging definition is simply "avisar de un riesgo a alguien" [to advise someone of the risk]. In all of these definitions, the word carries a valence relating to knowledge and avoidance.

kill Doña Felipa are intended to demonstrate publically the power structure extant in this community. This system of punishments and rewards and, in particular, the importance of ‘escarmientos’ [deterrents] thus connects directly to the advancement of the established hierarchy and the deterrence of other possible social arrangements.

Local religious figures also emerge as importantly possessing their own horizon of expectations in how they will provide guidance and a particular form of guardianship to the boys in Jorge Amado’s *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]. In particular, the Catholic Priest Padre José Pedro⁴⁷ and Don’Aninha, a Candomblé *mae-de-santo*, both serve as representative religious figures from their respective traditions of traditional Catholicism and Candomblé.⁴⁸ At the same time, these two characters occupy extremely different positions within the social matrix: in his position as a Catholic priest and a male, Padre José Pedro retains a clearly superior position to Don’Aninha whose ‘folk’ religion, sex, and dark skin all mark her inferiority in the matrix. Despite these significant religious and social differences, both figures recognize the Captains’ precarious social situation and further demonstrate a similar discontent and outright criticism of the Bahian social and political system that left these children on the streets. As a pair, these adults provide the only form of love and nurturing the young characters

⁴⁷ Although their approaches vary markedly, both Father Linares and Padre Jose Pedro act as guardians to the boys as mandated by an essentially similar Catholicism. Even if they take a different approach in the application and consideration of their institutional authority, their goals are fundamentally the same.

⁴⁸ In Brazil, the religious practice Candomblé involves a fusion of both Catholic and African traditions, the latter brought to the country first by slaves from central and western Africa and later immigrants following Brazil’s late emancipation of slaves in the 1890s. Within this practice, Catholic saints are often depicted alongside African deities. In his attempts to depict Candomblé rites accurately despite elite Brazil’s disdain but occasional use of the practice, Amado himself spent a great deal of time with its participants and became a practitioner himself, in 1959 receiving the title of obá oralu, a title of honor in the community (Wyles 26)

receive from outside their own group; yet despite their shared perspectives, there can be no meaningful alliance between the Catholic priest and the Candomblé priestess.

The different religious practices respectively adhered to by the adults certainly impacts the horizon of possibilities possessed by the two characters. Don'Aninha moves with a particular fluidity in her society, limited certainly by her religion, race, gender, and poverty, but with the intellectual liberty and perspective to relate to the children and the priest. Padre José Pedro, in contrast, remains constantly torn between a driving and often dominant desire to assist the Captains in any attempts to live their lives outside social structures – the hellacious, state-run *Reformatório* and the similarly shoddy orphanage – and inside the law and his own connection to the law and the Catholic Church.

Padre José Pedro often comes into conflict with the Catholic church over his relationship to the Captains and his approach to the priesthood as well. José Pedro entered the priesthood significantly later than traditionally done. Previously employed as a factory worker, José Pedro overheard his boss welcoming a bishop to the factory. When in a moment of overly religious zeal the employer offered to “custear os estudos de um seminarista ou de alguém que quisesse estudar para padre” [pay for the studies of a seminary student or for someone who wanted to become a priest] (Amado 73), José Pedro jumped at the opportunity despite the fact that he “não era considerado uma grande inteligência.... (já) não era moço e não tinha estudo algum” [was not considered to have great intelligence... neither was he still a young man nor had he studied anything] (73). Nonetheless, finally in his position [Ofício] as a priest, José Pedro views his profession as one of service, actively rejecting the “lavish attention” of “older women in the parish [who] feel it their duty to serve their priests and fawn over them” which, in turn raises the

suspicion of his less selfless colleagues (Anderson 9). In directing love towards the captains, the priest thus delicately breaks a traditional social law, an act of epistemic disobedience not dissimilar to Nana's act of loving her girl

Padre José Pedro's internal conflict comes to the foreground frequently in *Os capitães da areia*. In each episode, he exhibits a high level of anguish as his idealistic regarding his role in Bahian society divides his interests between his love for the children and his commitment to the institutions to which he is bound: his class, the law, and his faith. The example in the paragraph above demonstrates how priests, although sworn to poverty, tended to live off of the sacrifices of their congregation. Thus, while by no means rich, especially in North Eastern Brazil in the 1930s, the priest also evaded the life of luxury other priests enjoyed. At the same time, he also avoided the propensity towards anarchy found within the community. In a passage that closely narrates Padre José's relationship to the Captains, the particular challenge is clearly dissected

O difícil para o padre José Pedro era conciliar as coisas... Lá em cima, na Cidade Alta, os homens ricos e as mulheres queriam que os Capitães da Areia fossem para as prisões, para o reformatório, que era pior que as prisões. Lá embaixo, nas docas, João de Adão queria acabar com os ricos, fazer tudo igual, dar escola aos meninos. O padre queria dar casa, escola, carinho e conforto aos meninos sem a revolução, sem acabar com os ricos. Mas de todos os lados era uma barreira. Ficava como perdido e pedia a Deus que o inspirasse. E com certo pavor via que, quando pensava no problema, dava, se sequer o sentir, razão ao doqueiro João de Adão. Então

era possuído de temor, porque não fora assim que lhe haviam ensinado, e rezava horas seguidas para que Deus o iluminasse (113).

[The difficulty for Father José Pedro was reconciling things... There above, in the High City, rich men and women wanted The Captains of the Sands to be sent to the prisons, to the reformatory, which was worse than the prisons. There below, on the docks, Joao from Adão wanted to be done with the rich, to make everything equal, to give schools to the children. The priest wanted to give homes, school, love, and comfort to the children without revolution, without doing away with the rich. But on all sides there was some hurdle. He remained lost and asked for God's guidance. And with a certain dread he saw that, when thinking about the problem and without wanting to, Joao the dockworker was right. Then he was possessed with fear because that wasn't what they had taught him and he prayed for endless hours that God would give him illumination.]

Unlike *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] Father Linares, Father José Pedro understands a distance between his "sacred mission" and its earth-bound execution. Nonetheless, actually carrying out such a mission remains extremely difficult given the particular problems he understands as contextualizing life in Bahia. When José Pedro decides to preside over Dora's funeral, he does so against the strain of the church which would not have permitted him to engage so closely with Dona A'ninha and Candomblé, officially rejected by the church. This choice represents a moment of cohesion that required the thoughtful rejection of institutional requirements and as such generally received critical

censure from literary critics who saw in this act an idealism judged absent from the broader practice of religion and culture in Brazil.

This uneasy cohesion, suggested already in the 1930s by Jorge Amado, appears largely prescient when read in the context of Cristina Peri Rossi's depiction of life prior to but contextualized by the rise of the Uruguayan dictatorship. Most of the stories that comprise Cristina Peri Rossi's *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children's Rebellion] present intergenerational conflict between parent and child yet Peri Rossi's text deviates, frequently and creatively, from the mundane repetition of this traditional theme. It does so by showing how, in fact, the adults and children react strongly but against common sources of frustration. These stories present the intimate, shared familial social space as a constantly in flux intellectual field between people whose individual desires or methods may sometimes diverge. Because of these parents' distinct relationships with their children and the lack of other adult guardians in Peri Rossi, I study her depictions of parents more fully here rather than in the previous section.

La rebelión de los niños' [The Children's Rebellion's] first story, "Ulva Lactuca," clearly establishes this disputed space as one capable of permitting and even requiring dynamic exchanges.⁴⁹ This story, like most of the others, uses a variable third person voice that frustrates general attempts to demarcate precisely narrative shifts from the tale's two perspectives: the first belonging to a pre-verbal girl and the second to her father who attempts to feed her with a spoon from a bowl. The girl refuses and the text presents her simple reason in its first lines "Ella miró la cuchara con aversión. Era una cuchara de metal, oscura, con una pequeña filigrana en el borde y de sabor áspero (Peri

⁴⁹ *Ulva lactuca* is the latin word for the plant more commonly known in English as sea lettuce ("Sea Lettuce").

Rossi 5)” [She looked at the spoon with aversion. It was a metal spoon, dark, with a small filigree on the edge and with a rough taste.] Although growing increasingly impatient through the tale, the father attempts to cajole his daughter into eating, his methods ranging from pleading to putting the food in a different bowl. The father’s frustration at first appears to be a direct response to his daughter’s stubborn resistance to eat. With time, however, a deeper cause emerges as “*Ulva Lactuca*” ultimately reveals itself to be a story about a familial “Catástrofe: un suceso desgraciado que produce grave trastorno” [Catastrophe: a wretched event that leads to a great disruption”] (Peri Rossi 9). The central event that preoccupies the father’s mind and that also occasionally emerges as part of the daughter’s thinking involves the mother’s recent abandonment of the family but the thoughts themselves tumble between the father’s attempts to feed the girl, his obsession with the mother’s abandonment and the girl’s actions. Essentially then, he must contend with the failure of the family unit, an occurrence that has already happened even if the state’s goals, which the story “La rebelión de los niños” states clearly as including the perpetuation of stable families.

“*Ulva Lactuca*” vacillates between the girl’s limited thoughts and her father’s obsessions and particular concern regarding the girl’s mother. The story’s repeated use of nautical terms bolsters the fluidity of the narrative voice while maritime images including a shipwreck, drowned characters, and the titular sea lettuce subtly hint at the existence of underlying tragedy. This sea motif repeats in most of the stories while the narrative fluidity functions to highlight the continuity between many characters’ perspectives and the general instability of social relationships. The tension between characters grows increasingly gendered as well throughout the novel. Stories such as “Feliz Cumpleaños”

["Happy Birthday"] and "Vía Láctea" ["The Milky Way"] all elaborate upon tripartite social matrices comprised of mother, father, and a male child who, in one way or another, attempts to usurp his male parent's place in the family, or rather to reset the expectations for both his father and himself within the shared social plane. As the narration resituates itself in variable proximity relative to the thoughts, opinions, and attitudes of the different family members, ultimately this fluidity reveals the general lack of stability in any of the families or social situations depicted as well as, importantly, the parents' own displeasure and downright frustration with the social structures within which they find themselves playing ascribed but unfulfilling roles.⁵⁰

In Cristina Peri Rossi's final, titular story, "La rebelión de los niños", one final set of adults emerge unique from the other works. Nameless, faceless adults comprise the bureaucracy that establishes the exhibition of art against which the action from the story takes place. In the creation of the central event – an exhibition that highlights art produced by youth in their free time – the tale highlights the paradoxical attitude of these adults towards youth. These bodiless entities wholly replace the families, even if one stated objective for their existence involves the protection of the family. The whole performance elaborates on the paradox of requiring the production of a spontaneous creation while also requiring it to comply with a set of insidiously vague rules. Moreover, 'freedom' granted by the exhibition to its young participants highlights the age of these

⁵⁰ This observation merits a brief note regarding the publication of *La rebelión de los niños*. As has been mentioned elsewhere, Cristina Peri Rossi began to write the stories in the early 1970s prior to the 1973 military coup in Uruguay. The stories do not explicitly address this political situation but rather suggest a general social unease. As the author wrote of her final story – "La rebelión de los niños" from which she obviously took the collected work's name – "si lo hubiera publicado [en 1971], habría parecido descabellado, inverosímil... Los compañeros de viaje, además, lo habrían juzgado pesimista" (Peri Rossi 105) ["if I had published it then, it would have appeared absurd, implausible.... Besides, my "Travel Companions" would have judged it as pessimistic"].

characters demonstrates a deeply complex dynamic relating to their age in that the State at once dismisses them as powerless to create anything that would ultimately damage the State while also, by branding them and placing them in 'Rehabilitation' marking their positions as potential threats to this same stability. There are no bodies here – Nana, Priest, Priestess, or otherwise – rather the formless bureaucracy with its equally indistinguishable, and yet inviolable, rules, emerge as the shaping entity force prefiguring the participational possibilities for the youths it has requisitioned.

Final Considerations Regarding Adults and the Social Matrix

The social matrices considered in these novels creates parents who replicate the matrices' respective values through the implementation of sets of punishments and rewards, deterrents and incentives. As agents of the matrix, these adults – parents, guardians, teachers, priests, and Nanas – enact these schemata but often do so with no small measure of ambivalence as they react to the presence of unwieldy or unyielding figures such as the nameless authorities in *La rebelión de los niños*, *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers'] Father Linares, César Argüellos. While such abusive figures may bear a passing resemblance to the childhood villains of classic *Bildungsromane*, a major distinction emerges in the social impact the Latin American characters retain. These are already characters of social connection and importance unlike classical *Bildungsroman*'s step-parents who also often occupy the social margins. Moreover, closer adult parents and guardians, those who consider or attempt to relate to the young people they find in their company, do so with an ambivalence caused not by the children's or adolescent's actions but the entire system in which they reside. These adults do not fully reject the system, in fact sometimes they (temporarily) from its economic and/or social stability, such as in the

case of Zoraida. These adults are still significant and often fundamental to the structures of the novels and the societies depicted within them. Yet they do not pick up these roles with pleasure but rather with an unease expressed best by Cristina Peri Rossi when she notes that “esta horror” [this horror] by which she specifically references the Uruguayan military coup “ya existió otras veces” [already existed at other times] (Peri Rossi 105). Consequently, adults in these works uneasily repeat roles, the repetition of which evidences a range of emotions from ambivalence to frustration regarding the inherited social matrices.⁵¹

Peers and Siblings

Chapter Four of this dissertation considers the importance of expansive lateral groups; yet in our conversation here it is important to note the presence and significance of peer and sibling relations as these relationships permit an examination of how, if at all, the matrix can replicate itself through similar instances of punishment and reward already in the relationships shared by equals. To this end, peers and mentors occupy important roles in all of the texts considered. These relationships are somewhat flexibly defined as the vast majority involve chosen friendships or acquaintances to unrelated characters in the same age group (peers) or slightly older (mentors). One important factor to note regarding this volatility of social connection however involves the almost complete lack of older or similarly aged family members in all of these books. Family ties most certainly could

⁵¹ The emergence of political dictatorships as found in Peri Rossi’s work demonstrates the how corporate State structures arose that attempted to stabilize these matrices. At the same time, as we can see in Peri Rossi and as Castellanos’ writings also anticipate, in the promulgation of exclusive, hierarchically-organized social matrices, these systems also preconfigure their own demises. The recent writings of the Chilean novelist and poet Alejandro Zambra, *Formas de volver a casa* [Ways of Returning Home] and *Facsímil: libro de ejercicios* [Multiple Choice], use adolescence in order to examine this particular liminal space between authoritarian regime and the return of democracy. Future research intends to examine this particular use of adolescent liminality.

exist for these characters as one would assume older siblings or extended family members could act as meaningful members of an individual's social matrix.

As mentioned previously in footnote 29 above, of the texts under consideration, only *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] presents an extended family as important to the novel's protagonist. The strange cousins are acknowledged as part of César's generation; at the same time, their status as single women disorients their specific location within the matrix.⁵² Nonetheless, given their generational link to César, these relatives are significantly older than the children. Matilde especially occupies this space childlike deference to those around her despite her own claims of being much older. Here a major consideration involves not biological age but social situation as Matilde is not necessarily so much older than Ernesto Argüellos, with whom she shares a difficult to define attraction, her age and social status as an unmarried woman relinquish her to a position of not-quite-adulthood.

Ernesto Argüellos, César Argüellos' nephew and therefore cousin to both the Argüellos children, is the only identifiable adolescent in *Balún Canán*. Unlike Matilde, however, his position as single, employed man, albeit of only some 14- or 15- years of age, posits him already as part of the patriarchal system. Throughout the novel, Ernesto grapples to define his role in the family: his extramarital birth constantly placing him outside of legitimized society. His inability to find and articulate a space for himself leads to experiments in being. Knowing that his uncle and his father both slept with indigenous women as a means of expressing their own virility, he does so and his thoughts go to these conquests. He ultimately seems to express a deeper affection for Matilde but his

⁵² Romalia is in fact separated from her husband whose name is never given and who resides in Mexico's capital, very far, socially and geographically, from the women's residence in Palo María, Chiapas.

illegitimacy and her insecurity clash leading to a sexual encounter between the two that, while not precisely a rape, demonstrates the social imbalances and the sheer impossibility of social cohesion via reciprocal romantic relationships in this particular context.

Although produced in massively distinct circumstances, Ernesto Argüellos' ambivalence resonates most closely with a similar vacillation possessed by *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers'] Ernesto as both grapple to find a way to survive in the social matrix to which they respectively belong.

Despite the general absence of older members of the extended family, several of the texts, including most notably *Os capitães da areia*, "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"], and *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], tell stories of similarly aged cohorts that take on particular familial functions. Young adults, older adolescents, and similarly aged peers take on important roles throughout our texts as either examples of successful assimilation into adult life who have mastered the system of benefits and rewards successfully or as those who receive frequent punishments for their inability to assimilate. In these three works especially, older children and adolescents share social and pedagogical spaces, such as the abandoned warehouse from *Os capitães da areia* or the Miraflores school yard, that lend them opportunities to become a cohesive cohort. At the same time, and because of the distinct responses to the systems of punishments and reward, social cohesion remains, always, just out of reach.

Examining the ever-withheld possibility of cohesion permits us to see how that cohesiveness is never actually an objective for the social matrix. To this end and unlike most of the other texts, the "cachorros" [pups] from Mario Vargas Llosa's novella, do not, initially face a man-made social disaster but rather must react to a freak accident that

leaves one of their members castrated. This story, unlike the others, reveals through its unique narrative style the way in which this disaster becomes compounded by the matrix's reaction to the disastrous but natural event of the dog attack. The choral narrative style at once connects the cohort of young boys to Cuéllar, their injured comrade while simultaneously isolating him from them. Here though, and again as mentioned above, the narration continually reproduces this isolation through the simultaneous employment of the "nosotros" [we] alongside the "ellos" [they] so that no individual, narrator, or even the reader dominates but all are simultaneously within and outside of the group.

Mario Vargas Llosa described his attempt to use this "choral" style in the depiction of social precariousness so as to also highlight the importance, and continuity of the "barrio" [neighborhood]. Thus, while individual characters at once relate to and occasionally assist Cuéllar, and for that matter each other, in social belonging it is actually the neighborhood (Lima's elegant Miraflores district) that grants a sort of stability. Moreover, the neighborhood itself becomes a space of adolescence and one impacted in a way not explicitly shown in other texts by the import of Hollywood's "teenagers". Initially, Cuéllar and his cohort frequent the same movie houses and ice cream parlors but as the other members of the Cachorros find girlfriends they start to peel away, first spending Sundays courting girls at respective family homes and ultimately spending more and more time away from Lima's social spaces of adolescence. This begins to highlight a particular socio-spatial distortion: Miraflores' cinemas, parks, and ice cream provided the neighborhood's children and adolescents a venue for pre-romantic and friendly group outings that attracted youth around the same ages. In the context of

this “young” social space, Cuéllar grows to be anachronistic quickly in that he ages out of this pre-romantic space but lacks appropriate alternative spaces. Eventually, he begins to associate with Lima’s extremely marginalized groups: prostitutes and homosexuals all of whose behavior existed beyond the scope of allowable conduct even if, in its marginalization, these groups continued. In the novel, the “cachorros” [cubs] go twice to the prostitutes, once when young and some later return; for Cuéllar, however, this group comes to be his friends even though the text does not describe exactly how these relationships work and as a result distances Cuéllar from the “cachorros” [cubs] as he begins to find new friends.

It is fascinating to contrast the urban situation of the Cachorros and José María Arguedas’ depiction of a similar cohort but in a rural setting more than two decades prior. *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] like “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] portrays images of adolescent society. It is not the urban and bourgeois space of the barrio but the distinctly different space of the rural boarding school that provides a shape to the relationships of these young people in Arguedas’ novel. Here, young men come from around the rural mountainsides but they bring with them the markers of social hierarchy that they continue to “play out” in the space of the boarding school. The social dynamics of the schoolyard easily reflect a highlands Peruvian social dynamic in which landowners and their progeny retain the highest social positions (such as the case with Markask’a/Candle) while Quechua-speaking “indigenous” boys, such as Palacios, cannot escape social abuse despite their families’ historical importance and elevated economic standing. In this mix, a fledgling but imprecise middle group exists that includes Ernesto but also Lleras and Añuco, the latter pair establishing themselves through brute force and violence.

The system of rewards and punishments clearly gets replicated in the boys' life in Abancay. Markask'a whose original nickname means 'the marked one' earns the additional moniker of 'Candela' [or candle] due to his blonde hair, a physical attribute envied by his peers.⁵³ Initially friendly with Ernesto – the pair offer a humane alternative to Lleras and Añuco's reign of terror – they ultimately part company after the *chicheras'* uprising when Markask'a, wholly unable to see the reason for the women's unrest, sides with the authorities to the chagrin of Ernesto. To this end, just as Markask'a can seemingly do no wrong and benefits, increasingly, from the system of rewards and punishments, Palacios can do no right, receiving poor grades no matter his effort.

Amado's novel, like Arguedas', has two major sections. The first section of *In Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] presents the group of boys with a high level of sympathy: they rob, engage openly in homosexual sex with each other, and harass the townsfolk, but in general their crimes and misdemeanors rarely emerge from the text as unthinkable or wholly amoral given their destitute situation.⁵⁴ Their feats are punishable and held up, explicitly, against the rules of social norms, yet their deviance from these norms is continually explained. Subsequently, in the second section, the boys and particularly Pedro Bala encounter the consequences of this life lived outside of the law and its systems of punishments and rewards. In this latter section, they engage directly with the local police force as they attempt to steal a Candomblé icon from the

⁵³ The novel mentions blonde hair twice, once noting Ernesto's father's complexion and the second in its depictions of Markask'a. This physical description marks a particular class and racial background that, more directly, connects these two characters to the region's European colonizers.

⁵⁴ The book depicts, for example, several homosexual sex scenes between the Captains, explaining them not as nascent homosexual explorations potentially found in this age group but as a result of the lack of appropriate female romantic and sexual companionship given the Captains' low social status.

police station in order to return it to Don'Aninha. This will be further considered in the section on adolescent selves below.

The important shift from the first to the second part of the book takes place in the Chapter "As Docas" ("The Docks") which also serves as a liminal waypoint separating the group's development.⁵⁵ To understand how this works and its brutal importance necessitates an engagement with the previous and subsequent chapters. First, the preceding chapter, "As Luzes do Carrossel" ("The Lights of the Carousel"), highlights the boys' independence in being able to procure tickets for the carousel for themselves and because of their relationship with the carousel's owner. This scene additionally expands the relationship between Padre José Pedro and the Captains when the priest offers to pay for the boys' tickets (a reward), taking some money donated to him for the purchase of candles and putting it aside for his outreach project. This chapter presents the boys in a state of flux. On the one hand, they demonstrate their economic and social independence as well as a sharp social intelligence as they acknowledge Padre José's gift coming from a well-meaning but not entirely official place.⁵⁶ Yet at the same time and somewhat paradoxically, along with this explication of independence and a type of 'street wisdom' this chapter also focuses upon the boys' youth, as their central goal involves enjoying a few moments of childhood normalcy as offered by the carousel. This contrasts dramatically with the latter part of the novel, which I argue begins with the chapter "Aventura de Ogum" ("The Ogun Adventure") when the boys' exploits take them into

⁵⁵ The importance of this liminal communal group formation will be considered again in Chapter Four's examination of the various forms of the *communitas* found in the literature and films examined by this dissertation.

⁵⁶ As a reminder, the Priest offers to pay for the boys' tickets with money dedicated to the church by a widow who wished for him to use the funds to pay for new candlesticks.

direct and brutal confrontation with official state institutions – the police and the reformatory – bent on reforming the boys by breaking their individual wills. As we will see in a moment below, Pedro Bala’s occupation of the middle space, between innocence and wisdom, ultimately leads to an act of brutal violence.

Engaging with the position of youth as peers in the novels considered in this chapter demonstrates how, while some individuals may participate in the interchange of benefits and punishments found in the matrices, the protagonists generally reject these particular peers. At the same time, it is worth noting that little to no mention is made of younger children, siblings or otherwise. *Balún Canán*, in fact, represents the most important sibling relationship as it depicts the relationship between the narrator and her brother shifting subtly over the course of the novel’s first and final sections, a change explained largely by the characters spending more time together, particularly when the family travels to and then subsequently returns from the disastrous trip to the *hacienda*, Chactajal.⁵⁷ The children only really take notice of each other, according to the narrating girl, during the classes to prepare them to take their first communion when an overzealous teacher terrifies them with graphic descriptions of hell. The girl contemplates this, thinking

Mario y yo habíamos vivido siempre distraídos, mirando para otro lado,
sin darnos cuenta cabal uno del otro. Pero ahora adquirimos,
repentinamente, la conciencia de nuestra compañía. Con una lentitud casi
imperceptible fuimos arrimando nuestras sillas de tal modo que, cuando
Amalia nos participó que en el infierno bailaban los demonios bajo la

⁵⁷ As mentioned previously, the children only appear momentarily and in the periphery in these chapters as if their presence mattered not at all to the adults whose perspectives dominate this section.

dirección de Lucifer, pudimos cogernos, sin dificultad de la mano. Estaban sudorosas y frías de miedo (Castellanos *Balún* 344).

[Mario and I had always lived distractedly, looking apart and without paying much attention to each other. But now suddenly we took notice of each other's company. Almost imperceptibly slowly, we moved our chairs closer so that when Amalia informed us of how demons dance in hell at Lucifer's command, we could reach for each other's hands, cold and sweaty with fright, without difficulty.]

However, this alliance proves to be of short duration due to the fact that Mario contracts malaria and quickly dies after his mother attempts to seek assistance from a priest, indigenous cures, and even medical help, the last of which she ultimately rejects. It is this death that forces the girl to be first physically alone as she cannot be near her sick brother and then to take up a position as the only Argüellos heir, a scenario unplanned for by both her parents and apparently her society.

Younger children also appear in the choral of background voices in *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], *Os capitães da areia*, and "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"]. Particularly in the two novels, younger or less independent children such as *Los ríos profundos*' [Deep Rivers'] Palacios and *Os capitaes*' Sem Perna [Legless] receive support from the novel's older protagonists, with the older children and adolescents taking sometimes great pains to aid the younger or needier children. This age graded dependency privileges the older children and could represent a hierarchy but at the same time the protagonists from *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] to *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] to *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] ultimately choose not

replicate the hierarchy, a decision to be considered closely in the final chapter of my project.

A Third Consideration: Youth as Locus of Enunciation

As indicated in this chapter's introduction, the art exhibit that brings together the principal characters of Cristina Peri Rossi's "La rebelión de los niños" ["The Children's Rebellion"] creates a scenario that insidiously preconfigures the youths' 'spontaneous' artistic productions so that all that remains for these characters is their performance of particular roles rather than the production of anything radical, independent, or essentially new. The violent conclusion that builds directly from this set of rules shows how the young people's rebellion is already accounted for in the very rules that directed their participation in the event itself. More essentially and therefore more insidiously, even before mandating this performance, their very existence already been established in relation to cutting edge scientific, religious, and political discourses that at once took these young people as subjects for reform and delinquents to be condemned, excluded, and feared.

The texts this chapter has considered all use young people as narrators in order to engage with similar processes of preconfiguration that direct the behaviors and options for young people and thus preconfigure their behavior. Thus as we have already begun to see, young protagonists and central characters in all of these works emerge as individual but socially-contextualized entities not only relative to their parents' and guardians' frustrations and inabilities but in their own awareness of issues their parents and members of the older generation cannot see due to epistemological limits let alone understand. This process is very often reinforced by the utilization of a past tense such that individual

experiences are almost always told as part of complete narratives that have concluded, elsewhere and in some other time. To this end, while few of these works touch specifically, directly, or meaningfully on traditional considerations of “coming of age” – the onset of physical puberty, mentions of bodily changes such as a girl’s first menses or the development of secondary sexual characters – they all testify to other sets of ceremonial or ritual passages in which the young character comes to understand themselves as part of an unstable social matrix that orders the behavior of all through systems of punishment and reward that function as deterrents and incentives for the elaboration of schema regarding ‘proper’ social performance, i.e. behavior. In the majority of these works, children and, to a lesser extent, adolescents recognize injustices without necessarily understanding or recognizing the systems that create imbalances.⁵⁸

Even the youngest of child characters – *Balún Canán*’s nameless girl narrator and the “cachorros” as found in their novella’s first chapters – anticipate contemporary scientific findings regarding young children’s innate ability to recognize injustice. If narrators and protagonists are a novel’s most important characters, then reactions to injustices through which our young characters come into being in their respective novels. *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] takes great pains to marginalize its own narrator. The book situates itself between fragmented citations from Mayan books but written in Spanish. The effect of this is to interpolate our narrator not only between the fragments of the broken Chiapas social network but between the cultures and power dynamics present therein as well. The book’s first section opens with a citation from the Mayan *Libro del consejo* that says

⁵⁸ Philosophers and social scientists appear to disagree regarding children’s innate moral capacity. Future research will explore this disagreement.

Musitaremos el origen. Musitaremos solamente la historia, el relato. Nosotros no hacemos más que regresar; hemos cumplido nuestra tarea; nuestros días están acabados. Pensad en nosotros, no nos borréis de nuestra memoria, no nos olvidéis (Castellanos *Balún* 133).

[We will mutter the origin. We will only mutter the story, the tale. We will not return; we have completed our work; our days are finished. Think of us, do not erase us from our memory, do not forget us (Castellanos *Book* 12).]

This invocation in conjunction with the two other sacred Mayan citations frame the novel's three sections and establish a particular relationship between the reader and the material. In this first selection above, the text subtly articulates the existence of a "we" who will speak to a group of readers that is charged with the task of bearing witness to the text that follows but, perhaps more importantly, of remembering the existence of the tale's narrators. The novel's opening lines continues with this "us" and "they" discursive pattern as it opens, *in media res*, of a speech delivered by and to unnamed persons. "Y entonces, coléricos, nos desposeyeron," [And then, angry, they dispossessed us] murmurs this voice,

"nos arrebataron lo que habíamos atesorado: la palabra, que es el arca de la memoria. Desde aquellos días arden y se consumen con el leño en la hoguera. Sube el humo en el viento y se deshace. Queda la ceniza sin rostro. Para que puedas venir tú y el que es menor que tú y les baste un soplo, solamente un soplo..." (9).

[they seized that which we had treasured: the word, which is the ark of memory. Ever since those days they burn and consume the logs on the hearth. The smoke rises on the wind and dissolves. The ash without a face remains. All this so that you may come, you and the younger one, worth but a breath, only a breath...]

In this last utterance, just as a picture of the speech's audience begins to emerge – a “tú” (you) and an “él” (he) – another voice interrupts. Bored, due to perhaps the speech's verbosity but also its repetition, another yet-unnamed voice objects “No me cuentes ese cuento, nana” (Castellanos 133) [Don't tell me this story, nana].⁵⁹ Memory and witnessing consequently give way to a narrated present as second speaker disrupts the speech, demanding its cessation. In this way, our nameless niña [girl child] successfully continues to enact the rhetorical processes described in both the previous comments.⁶⁰

This short introductory scene between *Balún Canán*'s narrator and her Nana invokes the novel's key themes as pertinent to the development of these two characters in particular: the power of language and the marginalization of speakers based not on the content of the speech but on the ethnic, gender, and class identity of the speaker. The resulting unstable “I” that narrates the novel's first and third sections, is attributed to a girl who must be understood as a part of a hierarchical, social matrix in which the masculine always supersedes the feminine, the landowner supersedes the worker, and the Spanish-speaking descendent of colonizing powers supersedes the land's indigenous, Tzeltal-

⁵⁹ The girl rejects “ese” (“that”) story as opposed to “este” (“this”) story. The use of the somewhat more distant demonstrative adjective suggests a distance between the girl and the story not due to the story's immediate connection to her and her family, which would be rejected with a more immediate phrase such as “Don't tell me this.” By saying instead “Don't tell me that,” the narrator suggests a preexisting familiarity or proximity to the tale that could certainly be accounted for in its retelling.

⁶⁰ Idolina, the adolescent daughter analyzed in the Introduction to this dissertation, also rudely rejects her Nana's stories with similar comments.

speaking inhabitants. She is thus already preconfigured and her position as rejecting her Nana's story permits her one tiny way of beginning to act out the privilege of her place as daughter of landowners. When the end of the novel finds the girl facing the recent death of her brother, the lack of immediate social options as represented by the closing of her school, and the ultimate loss of her Nana, she seeks out a way to respond to these things and ultimately does so by grabbing a pen and scribbling her dead brother's name all around the house ("...escribí el nombre de Mario en las paredes del corredor. Mario, en los ladrillos del jardín. Mario, en las páginas de mis cuadernos" (Castellanos *Balún* 393) [I wrote Mario's name on the walls of the hallway. Mario on the garden bricks. Mario in the pages of my notebooks" (Castellanos *Nine* 271)]. The girl explains her reasons for doing so in the novel's final line. She explains that she wrote "Para que si Dios venía alguna vez a buscarlo creyera que estaba todavía aquí" (Castellanos *Balún* 393) [So that if God came sometime to look for him [Mario] He would believe that [I or he [Mario]] was still here].⁶¹ This final clause "que estaba todavía aquí" seems to refer to Mario but it could also, subtly, nod to the girl's assertion of her presence as the verb could either translate to "he was still here" or "I was still here." No matter the grammatical subject this phrase serves as an assertion of self not fully acknowledged before and certainly demonstrates how the narrating girl will have come to narrate the book just finished in this utterance. At the same time, *Balún Canán's* [The Nine Guardians'] conclusion simultaneously emphasizes its narrator's ultimate isolation. In contrast to *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] which closes on the image of a sleeping Idolina dozing while her Nana tells stories of

⁶¹ I have completed my own translation of this final line because the standard English translation wholly fails to correspond with the Spanish.

powerful women leaders, *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] instead finds its girl all alone and scribbling.⁶²

Much like *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] nameless girl, José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] creates a narrative witness to the plot's unfolding events. Throughout this novel, Ernesto fashions a locus of enunciation that privileges his act of witnessing the human and natural atrocities that occur in Abancay. Ernesto constantly navigates the interstitial space between institutions and society as represented first by the relationship between his father and uncle and later by his relationship with the priest. Ernesto eventually comes to reside within this middle space. In fact, many of the novel's scenes that occur on the bridge represent moments of Ernesto finding himself apart from the social matrices that define him within the confines of first Cuzco then Abancay. This distance allows the character to recognize without assimilating the distinct pieces of his own culture and the different claims they make to him as well as requirements they will communicate to him. The book's conclusion finds him running away to the mountains, expressly in search of his uncle's *hacienda*. At the same time, given his inability to assimilate the lessons presented him and particularly his ultimate rejection of Markask'a, it is clear that this escape will be but temporary and more than likely will include a similar interstitial balancing act as that he performed in Abancay.

Jorge Amado's novel situates its orphaned characters, including the novel's protagonist, Pedro Bala, as part of trajectories limited in the narrated events but yet that

⁶² The isolation of the girl characters contrasts markedly with the boys. Even in her school, *Balún Canán*'s narrator never describes female friends of her own age. Only Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" [The Pups] makes mentions of girls in a collective group. Vargas Llosa's girls are less individually demarcated than his "cachorros" [pups], who speak, as previously shown, in a choral form that already collectivizes them into a group rather than a band of individuals.

simultaneously testify to a future of possibility in *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]. The limitations have been clearly drawn out before: Pedro Bala, like Peri Rossi's characters some fifty years later, as an orphan, exists already in a space outside of family but also beyond the law such that reform is, in the perspective of the state, a temporary solution prior to his adulthood which will, more than certainly in the perspective of this matrix, lead to his future imprisonment. The novel concludes with a lengthy passage demonstrating how this dynamic game of cat-and-mouse cannot actually reform Pedro Bala but rather serve come to be part of a narrative in which he will emerge as a hero for the working people.

Anos depois os jornais da classe, pequenos jornais, dos quais vários não tinham existência legal e se imprimiam em tipografias clandestinas.... publicavam sempre notícias sobre um militante proletário, o camarado Pedro Bala, que estava perseguido pela polícia de cinco estados como organizador de greves, como dirigente de partidos ilegais, como perigoso inimigo da ordem estabelecida.

No ano em que todas as bocas foram impedidas de falar no ano que foi todo ele uma noite de terror, esses jornais (únicas bocas que ainda falavam) clamavam pela liberdade de Pedro Bala, líder de sua classe, que se encontrava preso numa colônia.

E, no dia em que ele fugiu, em inúmeros lares, na hora pobre do jantar, rostos se iluminaram ao saber da notícia. E, apesar de que lá fora era o terror, qualquer daqueles lares era um lar que se abriria para Pedro Bala,

fugitivo da polícia. Porque a revolução é uma pátria e uma família
(Amado 270).

[Years later, good newspapers, little newspapers, several of which existed illegally... kept publishing news about a militant proletarian, Comrade Pedro Bala, who was sought by the police of five States as an organizer of strikes, as the director of illegal parties, as the dangerous enemy of the established order.

In the year that all mouths were prevented from speaking, in the year that was one whole night of terror, those newspapers (the only mouths still speaking) demanded the freedom of Pedro Bala, the leader of his class, who was imprisoned in a penal colony.

And the day he escaped, in numberless homes at the hour of their poor meal, faces lighted up when they heard the news. And in spite of the fact that the terror was out there, any one of those homes was a home that would be open for Pedro Bala, a fugitive from the police. Because the revolution is a homeland and a family (Amado *Captains* 260)].

In ending Pedro Bala's story as such *Os capitães da areia* includes a set of conclusions that show its young characters living in a world transformed by their participation as critics of the social matrix that found ways, via political or intellectual activism as represented in Pedro Bala's political campaigns or O professor's journalistic undertakings. This conclusion fails to account for how the characters found ways to escape the consequences for the actions they completed in the course of the novel's plot – the rape of a young girl, the constant thievery, etc. – yet it still presents a future in which

these characters integrate themselves in Brazilian life and for its betterment, a theme that too is rife with ideological underpinnings. Despite the choral nature of this narrative and a certain linguistic playfulness – Pedro Bala’s name, for example, refers to the Brazilian word for bullet and but also is the name of a regional chocolate – this quick reversal violates the horizon established by the narrative for these characters and thus disconnects itself from the reader’s expectations by quickly and with little explanation changing the course for these characters. Ultimately then, *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] attempts to tell a story of individuals changing the function and direction of the social matrix but without plot or aesthetic justification.

While Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] creates a choral narrative style not wholly dissimilar from that created by Amado’s *Os capitães da areia*’s [The Captains of the Sands], in the latter work the relationship of the individual to a social matrix provides both the complicated narrative challenge and a driving impulse to the plot of Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”]. It is tempting to identify Cuéllar as the novella’s protagonist and prior to this point I have done so to simplify this issue. An early (1970) edition of the work goes so far as to give it two names *Los cachorros* (*Pichula Cuéllar*). That Cuéllar plays a central role in the plot’s development is thus not in doubt. At the same time, and particularly given Mario Vargas Llosa’s claims regarding the extreme importance of the narrator, it must be argued that the Cachorros and Cuéllar act in concert as the novel’s central figures.⁶³ Evidence of this

⁶³ Vargas Llosa in his analysis of José María Arguedas’ writings, brashly declares that The narrator is the most important character in fiction, whether an omniscient being, external to history – the self-worshipping God the Father of classic romantic tales or the discrete – or an implied narrator, witness to or protagonist of that which he narrates. He is the first character an author must invent to represent him in the made-up story. This is because his movements, his mannerisms and silences, his perspectives and points of view determine whether what he talks

reading is found in the choral structure utilized by “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] at once highlights and conceals the central event of the boy’s castration. Read carefully, the scene immediately preceding the dog attack involves the most precise characterization of the individual group members.

A veces ellos se duchaban también, guau, pero ese día, guau guau, cuando Judas [el perro] se apareció en la puerta de los camarines, guau guau guau, sólo Lalo y Cuéllar se estaban bañando: guau guau guau guau. Choto, Chingolo y Mañuco saltaron por las ventanas, Lalo chilló se escapó mira hermano y alcanzó a cerrar la puertecita de la ducha en el hocico mismo del danés (108-109).

[Sometimes they all showered together, grrrr, but that day, grrrr-grrrr-, when Judas [the dog] appeared in the locker room doorway, grrrr grrrr grrr, only Lalo and Cuéllar were bathing: grrr grrrr grrr grrr. Choto, Chingolo and Manuco jumped through the window, Lalo screamed look man he escaped and managed to shut the shower door on the Great Dane’s snout]

From this moment on, Cuéllar exists as at once central to his friends’ concern, consideration, and conversation but ultimately on the margins of his group of friends. This is at first due to Cuéllar’s hospital stay but soon after due to the way his community responds to his castration, creating a situation in which Cuéllar himself becomes against

about appears to be true or unconvincing, an illusion that imposes itself as reality or one that stands out as mere artifice (Vargas Llosa “A Bullfight” 36-37). Thus even if “Los cachorros” does not contain a traditional first-person testimonial narrator it still maintains a narrating voice that enacts a crucial, driving perspective as we have seen through many examples from this text.

part of “a great many thematic obsessions found [already in Mario Vargas Llosa’s earlier] *The Time of the Hero*.... anxiety, rites of passage, sexual fantasy, codes of machismo” (Castro-Klären 77). Here, as mentioned previously, just as Lima could not offer a medical solution to Cuéllar’s physical ailment nor could it offer a narrative through which he could connect to his society especially as his friends grew up and paired off with women.

“Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] presents two moments in which Cuéllar almost finds a means of assimilating into Lima society. The first involves a flirtation with Teresita Arrarte, a girl around the same age as the Cachorros. Teresita arrives in the boys’ adolescent years and appears genuinely drawn to Cuéllar. No specific details emerge regarding the relationship’s failure to thrive but the Miraflores girls’ gossip, most frequently concerned with the critical derision of Cuéllar’s behavior in the novel, seems to attribute this to Teresita’s eventual impatience with Cuéllar who never really seems to make a move.⁶⁴ A later moment of almost assimilation comes when Cuéllar begins to imitate the model Hollywood teenager, James Dean.

⁶⁴ In the most explicit, yet still subtle mention regarding his castration, Cuéllar quietly remarks shortly after Teresita’s arrival that

lo iban a operar, y ellos ¿qué decía, Pichulita?, ¿de veras te van a operar?, y él como quien no quiere la cosa ¿qué bien, no? Se podía, sí, no aquí sino en Nueva York, su viejo lo iba a llevar, y nosotros qué magnífico, hermano, qué formidable, qué noticia, ¿cuándo iba a viajar?, y él pronto, dentro de un mes, a Nueva York, y ellos que se riera, canta, chilla, ponte feliz, hermanito, qué alegrón. Sólo que no era seguro todavía, había que esperar una respuesta del doctor, mi viejo ya le escribió, no un doctor sino un sabio, un cráneo de esos que tienen allá y él, papá, ¿ya llegó?, no, y al día siguiente ¿hubo correo, mamá?, no corazón, cálmate, ya llegará, no había que ser impaciente y por fin llegó y su viejo lo agarró del hombro: no, no se podía, muchacho, había que tener valor” (Vargas Llosa “Los cachorros” 91-92).

[They were going to operate on him, and they what are you saying, Pepe? Really are they going to operate on you? And he who wouldn’t want that? How great, right? It could happen, not here but in New York, his old man was going to take him, and we how great, brother, how exciting, what great news, when was he going? And he, soon, within a month, to New York, and they smiled, laughed, cheered, be happy little brother, what happiness. Only it still wasn’t for sure, they had to wait for a response from the doctor, my old man already wrote to him, not only a doctor but a scholar, a genius

se lo veía en las esquinas, vestido como James Dean (blue jeans ajustados, camisita de colores abierta desde el pescuezo hasta el ombligo, en el pecho una cadenita de oro bailando y enredándose entre los vellitos, mocasines blancos), jugando trompo con los cocacolas, pateando pelota en un garaje, tocando rondín. Su carro andaba siempre repleto de rocanroleros de trece, catorce, quince años y, los domingos, se aparecía en el <<Waikiki>> (hazme socio, papá, la tabla hawaiana era el mejor deporte para no engordar y él también podría ir, cuando hiciera sol, a almorzar con la vieja, junto al mar) con pandillas de criaturas, mírenlo, mírenlo, ahí está, qué ricura, y qué bien acompañado se venía, qué frescura (Vargas Llosa *Los cachorros* [“The Cubs”] 142-143)”

[he [Cuéllar] was seen on Street corners, dressed like James Dean (tight blue jeans, brightly colored t-shirt opened from chest to his navel, on his chest a small gold chain dancing and getting caught in his chest hairs, White moccasins), playing around with the “cocacolas” [teenagers], kicking a ball around in the garaje, playing the guitar. His car went around always full of 13-, 14-, and 15- year old “rock-and-rollers” and on Sundays he would show up at the Waikiki (Make me a member, dad, surfing was the best sport for staying in shape, and he could go too when he wanted to get some sun or have lunch with his wife by the sea.)]

like those they have there, and to his father, has the answer arrived? No, and the next day, any mail mom? No sweetheart, calm down, it will come, he didn't have to be impatient because at last the response arrived and his old man shrugged his shoulders: no, no they couldn't do it, son, you have to be brave.]

This scene demonstrates the lack of connection the reader has to any of the characters' interior ideas or ongoings. The family's attempts to find a cure for their son remained a private affair outside the text.

This passage illustrates the arrival of Hollywood ideas of being a teenager, a concept linguistically foreign to Spanish, which only partially explains the importation of commercial language to describe the younger wave of adolescents with which Cuéllar comes to associate following his peers' departures. This provides, as described previously, a temporary but highly individualized reprieve and gives Cuéllar a means through which to act out his own adolescence via the narrative provided by James Dean's making appealing a particular marginality. However, much unlike the "Rebel without a Cause" Cuéllar retains a deep anxiety that consistently reemerges from this narrative despite the different modalities through which it articulates itself. He ultimately cannot assimilate to his society in large part because there are few, if any options or trajectories previously established for individuals such as this. At one point towards the end of the novel the Cachorros even quietly mention that perhaps the only remaining option is for Cuéllar to become homosexual, a 'solution' that fails to meet the central problem as it is not one of a distinct sexuality still considered deviant by bourgeois Lima society but of general options. Still this conclusion demonstrates how the horizon of expectations fails to provide viable trajectories for characters such as Cuéllar but also for his cohort. This novella thus testifies to the tragic, but preconfigured ends of a social matrix rigidly bent on its own preservation.

Chapter 3 – Concluding Thoughts

The previous chapter's close reading of child and adolescent protagonists reveals that young, central characters emerge from a discursive locus of enunciation created at the junction of the textual reader, the social matrix, and the young person themselves. These characters must constantly resituate themselves relative to both the reader's expectations

and the not necessarily equivalent expectations enacted by other characters in the novels. Liminal characters, poised between child- and adulthood these characters also move in a space of flux defined by an assumption of freedom from particular legal or social responsibilities attendant to adulthood or by expectations of their own innocent ignorance that a close evaluation of their actions in novels and stories themselves quickly destroys. In this context, orphanhood especially acts as a compounding factor requiring an additional level of navigation while sometimes permitting an additional layer of flux, as we saw specifically in *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands].

Despite the challenges inherent to their specific loci of enunciation, at the conclusion of their respective stories almost all of the children and adolescents considered in this chapter have created for themselves a space from which they speak, while the texts assure the reader will lead to lives of social importance. *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] nameless narrator scribbles away on the walls of her family's home, a nod to a future of either independence as found by her Aunt Francisca or a profession in letters. *Los ríos profundo*'s [Deep Rivers'] Ernesto escapes both the army's suppression of the indigenous uprising and the outbreak of a disease and runs off to his uncle's hacienda, taking with him his critical understanding of the Church and the landed elite's complicit role in the continued suppression of Peru's indigenous peoples. The surviving "Captains" from Amado's novel find socially sanctioned, if politically disruptive, roles for themselves as journalists, priests, and activists. The various children and adolescents from Peri Rossi's novel, having shared moments of varied significance with parents, guardians, and other adults, stay the course created for them by their individual matrices, none more so than the novel's final pair that conclude their story

running away from the burning shell of the museum that attempted to exploit the youths' free time in service to the state. Even the remaining "cachorros" [cubs] in their assimilation to bourgeois adult lives testify to the broader social contexts in which they take place – a country in need of serious social reform, the economic and political diaspora, the ambivalent acceptance of the Global North's cultural dominance and its disruptions in local social praxes.

While only "Los cachorros" [The Cubs] and *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] provide significant details regarding the lives of their characters following the events depicted by the respective novels, the final trajectory deployed by all of these stories involves the overcoming of youth and the liminal moment these characters found themselves living. As Rosario Castellanos wrote in her poem "Monólogo de la extranjera" ["The Foreign Woman's Monologue"] "Y bien. La juventud,/ aunque grave, no fue mortal del todo./Convalecí. Sané" (Castellanos "Monólogo")) ["and so youth, though serious was not fatal. I convalesced. I healed"] (Castellanos). Moreover, in showing these characters' awareness to lessons learned involving injustice, empathy, social disorder, and oppression their maturity will not be one of thoughtless assimilation but of social critique, outcry, and activism.

All of these stories reject an assimilation prescribed by western *Bildungsroman* yet at the same time they retain a *telos* that speaks of lives capable of reaching biological and emotional maturity. Even in the destruction of buildings, these youths thus remain bound in some ways to the hierarchical social matrices that produced them. As egregious as these young people and sometimes even the other members of their social matrices generally find their prescribed trajectories, they can never fully escape them. No story

demonstrates the power of this dynamic more fully than Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" ["The Cubs"] in that all of the young people and their parents fail to acknowledge any power to change their own society in the provision of a means of entry for an injured acquaintance. The Cubs as adults and parents themselves simply continue repeating their lives along the trajectories permitted them even as the broader, hemispheric dynamics loom on the horizon as a powerful catalyst, potentially threatening to the order of these same matrices.

Chapter Four

Forever Young?

Immanent Liminalities as Horizons as Escape

Junot Diaz's 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* structures its central narrative around the death of Oscar as announced in the book's title. It situates this "death foretold" within a narrative that juxtaposes the perspectives of book's four main characters: Oscar Cabral; his sister, Lola; their mother, Belicia (Beli); and the narrator, Yunior. The latter character's involvement with the family stems from an adolescent infatuation he feels for Lola, an emotional motivation that led him to a deep involvement with the family in which he came to act as a guardian of sorts for Oscar. Diaz's novel, which will be addressed more fully throughout this chapter, juxtaposes experiences of violence that changed the course of the Cabral family both in the Dominican Republic and in their diasporic residence in New Jersey.

The violence experienced by each character shapes both their respective adolescences and adulthoods. At the same time, these central traumatic events – the brutal beating that left Beli nearly dead, the rape Lola experiences at the hand of an acquaintance, the entirety of Oscar's painfully awkward and isolating adolescence – certainly explain the characters and their behaviors, at the same time they only finally coalesce as part of other character's observations. Thus even though a particular event such as Beli's near death experience in a Dominican Republic canefield will certainly echo in the lives and experiences of the other characters, the centrality of these elements

as focal points of the respective character's narrative emerges only when events may be considered after reading the other characters' chapters. To illustrate, the narration mentions Lola's hair twice in the context of in Oscar's chapter long before Lola's chapter explains it in detail. The first time the narrative mentions Lola's hair comes in the context of a much longer passage regarding Lola's generally tough demeanor and its cause.

Oscar's sister, Lola, was a lot more practical. Now that her crazy years were over – what Dominican girl doesn't have those? – she'd turned into one of those tough Jersey dominicanas, a long-distance runner who drove her own car, had her own checkbook, called men bitches, and would eat a fat cat in front of you without a speck of vergüenza. When she was in fourth grade she'd been attacked by an older acquaintance, and this was common knowledge throughout the family (and by extension a sizable section of Paterson, Union City, and Teaneck), and surviving that urikán of pain, judgement, and bochinche had made her tougher than adamantine. Recently she'd cut her hair short-flipping out her mother yet again – partially I think because when she'd been little her family had let it grow down past her ass, a source of pride, something I'm sure her attacker noticed and admired" (Diaz 24-25).

This passage, which comes in the midst of Oscar's initial chapter, highlights the narrating Yunior's theory of the haircut's underlying cause and relates it to the sexual assault known and considered by not only the family but a large network of people in northeastern New Jersey.

The frequently examined revelation of young Lola's sexual assault obscures two less commented elements that this passage reveals and which also merit our attention. First, this dramatic episode, although important in the consideration of Lola's character, takes place during Oscar's first chapter and breaks up a description of the two siblings sharing a rare moment of tenderness during which Lola attempts to give her brother some gentle advice. This moment is one of a few moments of tenderness shared by the two characters over the course of Oscar's chapter and thus also introduces the persistent isolation of the individual members of the Cabral family that seems to result both from the specifically traumatic events and the historical context that perpetuated them. Second, this passage highlights how both Oscar and Lola existed in bodies that made them targets and how they attempted to change their bodies to avoid external threats. Both Lola's physique and Oscar's weight attract negative attention from their community yet, while Oscar's feeble attempts to get himself into better physical shape receive praise from Lola and their mother, Lola's attempts to alter her appearance ultimately only bring additional attention and criticism from both her mother and their neighbors. Ultimately, this episode demonstrates the general impossibility of personal connections even in moments that acknowledge the shared difficulties and vulnerabilities born by the individual members of the Cabral family. In this way, Diaz's novel and in particular its first section introduces a different schema than that found within the novels previously examined in this dissertation in that adolescent bodies no longer permit resistance, such as we found in the introductory considerations of *Oficio de tinieblas* [Book of Lamentations]. Instead, as we will see throughout this chapter, young bodies continue to participate in positive and negative rituals such as previously described by Van Gennep (see Chapter One). While

no amount of ceremony or ritual ultimately emerges as capable of protecting young people from violence and death, at the same time these rituals do function to create an immanent liminality and an emergent *communitas* as described by Victor Turner.

Introduction

Little specific or direct mention is made in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* of transitional moments between childhood and adolescence or adolescence and adulthood.

However, despite the absence of direct quotations, this occurs because, when the text is read closely, traditionally “adolescent” phenomena such as the social acknowledgement of an individual’s nascent sexuality more readily attributed to adolescence are already found explicitly and sometimes painfully present in the text’s description of childhood.

Thus, as throughout this project, the concept of liminality again proves useful in permitting a specific engagement with this interstitial, transitory space between two events: childhood and adulthood. In and of itself, this space can and has been investigated for both its temporariness and its teleological thrust towards a subsequent sequence of life which, in many cases, promises to act as a more complete, perfect or whole phase. Van Gennep’s initial analysis put the most emphasis on this transitional mode and its trajectory of transcendence while Turner focuses on the metaphor’s expansive spatial aspects through his exploration of the lateral or horizontal potential found when individuals occupying the liminal position in ways suggesting permanence. Much more recently, Garcia conceptualizes of this using the metaphor of nested dolls in which distinct, larger entities enclose smaller ones such that each phase is brought to completion

its consideration relative to other phases.¹ The literary works considered in the previous chapters generally posit such evidently distinguishable phases.

Liminality, for all intents and purposes, permits an engagement with the continuities and discontinuities alike found in aging and in many of the socialized praxes of belonging that are, in turn, continually refigured in the context of individual cultural praxes. Actual ruptures, that is the breaks away from trajectories, may be read as resulting from and reproducing conflicts between the individual and his or her society. Such conflicts involve the irreducible personal events that change the course and outcome of individuals and of fictional characters. Read closely, however, Latin American and Latino/a/x literature both demonstrate how such events cannot be understood as merely the internalized response of the individual to unfortunate circumstances but rather that such events demand to be considered but as part of systemic violence(s) that individual liminal trajectories cannot resolve.

Latin American and Latino/a/x literatures' depictions of adolescent disturbances often elaborate upon the inability of particular liminal characters to exit states of liminality result directly from historical, and increasingly economic, processes which in turn are contextualized by major social imbalances. While Chapter Three considered liminal characters who follow paths of social protest, this chapter considers characters paralyzed by their inability to escape these circumstances. To this end, in Chapter Three, I examined liminal characters – children and adolescents – through the lens of the ideal reader in order to analyze how young characters perform as part of both the reader's horizon of expectations and as a constitutive part of a unique social matrix comprised by

¹ Garcia's work remains conceptually useful here in its presentation of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood as essentially complete units enclosed within and therefore created by subsequent steps.

the relationships shared between the young protagonists and the other members of their respective social spheres. That chapter demonstrated how particular young characters understand social injustices as ugly and not wholly necessary parts of their worlds. With a one specific exception – Mario Vargas Llosa’s “The cachorros” – these texts depict youth whose maturity progresses through the rejection of particularly repellent social praxes and ideas passed on by previous generations. The conclusions of most of these texts reveal their young protagonists not as fully assimilated adults but as young people who continue to prepare in one way or another. As Castellanos’ unnamed girl begins to scribble over the walls, literally making her mark on the family that so often ostracized her due to her sex so Ernesto sets out for his uncle’s hacienda retaining the same rebellious focus on the injustices enacted by nature and society upon his country’s indigenous peoples.

The third chapter’s characters did not, for the most part, explicitly demonstrate the passage of young people from child- to adulthood. In this way, adolescence or the passage itself remained a major theme and conclusions for the majority of those works involved the presentation of open-ended, non-conclusive finales wherein the young people simply continued in the trajectory they had established for themselves across the body of their texts.² To this end, Castellanos’ *Balún Canán*, Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], and Peri Rossi’s *La rebelión de los niños* [The Children’s

² As a reminder, Mario Vargas Llosa’s “cachorros” [cubs] and Amado’s “capitães” [captains] may generally be read as outliers to this consideration as the texts generally include snapshots of their adulthood. Just as the band of cubs from Vargas Llosa’s text assimilate and follow normalized socioeconomic trajectories, Amado’s young people, for the most part, also select and follow socially allowable paths that permit them some means through which to continue enacting their particular social criticism. IE: through choosing professions in the church, art, journalism, or activism, Amado’s characters assimilate into adult lives through which they could, potentially at least, change the situations that ostracized them in their respective youths.

Rebellion], all continue to show adolescence as a teleological phase leading progressively toward a higher plane of adult existence. For Castellanos', Arguedas', Peri Rossi's, and Amado's characters, rejection of the previous generations' errors permits them a means of moving forward in order to correct these issues while, by means of contrast, Vargas Llosa's "cachorros" move forward by repeating the actions of the previous generations.³

The upcoming chapter concerns literary characters whose adolescent experiences reject the transcendent teleologies found consistently in the narratives considered previously. These characters' occupation of interstitial social spaces inextricably binds them in crucial ways to their individual communities. To be sure, one reading of such characters would suggest that they inhabit states of permanent or semi-permanent adolescence because of a general lack of social options. However, while many of these characters find employment through their work in one or multiple jobs, have children, engage in meaningful or at least deliberate romantic and/or sexual relationships, they cannot be read as fully functioning adults due to a lack of social power and insight into their own situation. In contrast with most of the characters found in Chapter Three, these characters generally lack a heightened social consciousness, elevated sense of social purpose, and potentiality of acting as agents for social change.

Yet a second, alternative, reading exists regarding characters who inhabit interstitial social spaces. This reading focuses on the *telos* established for the characters by the novels' distinct social spheres. To this end, rather than suggesting or

³ In contrast with works of *Bildungsroman*, these characters do not overcome adversity, acquire wealth, and return to the scenes of childhood crimes and injustices but rather they incorporate these injustices into themselves in order to continue onward in the trajectory of social reforms. The important distinction resides in the focus on community rather than individuality and this similarly impacts the trajectories of these characters.

demonstrating a set of transcendental purposes or goals that would posit the individual as subject to processes characterized through the overcoming of trying situations, the novels and film under consideration throughout this chapter engage a different, non-transcendental *telos* through the construction of *communitas* groups in their respective societies' interstitial spaces. Thus, much like the previous chapter's texts, Junot Diaz's *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Cary Fukunaga's *Sin nombre* [Nameless], Roberto Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives], and Fernando de Meirelles and Katia Lund's *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] also take adolescent liminality as a central theme but do so for a much different purpose. By examining the nontranscendent teleologies of their respective characters, and showing both adolescents and adults for whom mature, adult success cannot or will not be a possibility, these texts open up the possibility of an expansive concept of adolescent social *communitas* that expands beyond an age-based limit.

Teleological Considerations

A significant component related to the formation of the self that has thus far been glossed in this project involves the critical consideration of the *telos* as the ultimate goal for the development of the self. In the previous chapter, for example the lack of such a teleological option dooms Cuéllar while even the most socially critical of characters, *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] little girl or *Os capitães da areia*'s [The Captains of the Sands] Pedro Bala find a way to remain part of their societies. Since Aristotle and the early Greeks, the concept of the *telos* [define] has been tied to the formation of the individual's moral character and most significantly the ultimate purpose of these developments in the context of Greek society. Aristotle writes that "all living things both

move and are moved for the sake of something, so that this is the limit of all their movement – that for the sake of which” (Aristotle *De Motu* 6, 700 15-16). This ‘teleology’, or search for transcendent purpose, is “thought by many to be the key to Aristotle’s thought” (Johnson 1). It moreover corresponds to Aristotle’s own exploration of limits and purposes, not the least of which being the individual’s intellectual pursuits within the context of his social sphere.⁴ In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the few chapters focusing directly on Oscar’s adolescence show him pursuing his interests and knowledge in a small social sphere. These episodes show Oscar’s interests in science fiction and fantasy worlds and his mastery of their knowledges – he is able to distinguish between J.R.R. Tolkien’s invented languages with ease - only serve to isolate him from most of his peers. At the same time, when Oscar begins to seek out knowledge of his family and their history, this too is met with resistance and his completed project never arrives. As we can see here then the pursuit of *telos* must be understood as part of a social sphere or else a figure exists in isolation, such as we see with Oscar.

The centralization of ‘teleology’ to the study of Aristotle originates from the philosopher’s repeated concern regarding the purpose behind the things he analyzed. At the same time “the exact term ‘teleology,’ or its equivalents in other languages, is not attested [to, sic.] before 1728” at which time Christian Wolff, a German philosopher, “recommended *teleologia* as a name for that part of natural philosophy... which explicates the ends of things” (Johnson 30). As Johnson shows, the specific exploration of “final causes” revealed “hidden parts of philosophy that needed to be brought to light

⁴ Aristotle himself describes this in relation to the eventual surpassing of initial intellectual limits, noting in his *De Anima* [On the Soul] that “all practical processes of thinking have limits – they all go on for the sake of something else, and all theoretical processes come to a close” (Aristotle *Anima* I 3, 407 23-25).

and organized into a system” (30).⁵ Immanuel Kant found in this “milieu” the presence of two specific finalities the “intrinsic (or immanent) finality and [the] extrinsic (or relative) finality” (31-32). This distinction demonstrates, again, the linked importance of the individual or “natural” development reached in the ‘intrinsic’ finality and the social considerations elaborated upon by the latter extrinsic or relative finality (32). The example from *Oscar Wao* above again proves illustrative here in that it demonstrates the failure of a balancing of these extrinsic and intrinsic objectives.

Johnson relates the Kantian critical approach back to Aristotle’s examination of functions and ends in his own philosophy. In his *Eudemian Ethics*, Aristotle elaborates upon his idea of purpose, or ‘finality’ to use Kant’s term. He writes

The function of each thing is its end.... It is obvious then that the function is better than the state. For the end, as end, is best. **For it was assumed that the best and the final is the end for the sake of which all the other things exist** (EE ii 1, 1219a 8-23, emphasis my own).⁶

In terms of human life, Aristotle approaches this exploration of finality as originating in human deliberation and choice (Johnson 212). Already in that origin, however comes a consideration of ends, such that, as Aristotle wrote in his *Nichomachean Ethics*, “the

⁵ Wolff’s work initiated something of a small frenzy that culminated with Immanuel Kant’s publishing of *The Critique of Teleological Judgment* in 1790. Johnson notes that the “close examination of some of [Kant’s *Critique of Teleological Judgement*’s] main tenets reveals that many of its distinctions have had a great, even if indirect, influence on the post-Kantian reconstruction of Aristotelian teleology [such that] “it is possible to detect a Kantian strain in much of the twentieth-century work on Aristotle’s teleology” (Johnson 32).

⁶ According to Johnson’s analysis, Aristotle’s use of particular yet differentiated Greek words for function in this passage matters significantly. Aristotle himself elaborates upon the fact that ‘function’ may be “said in two ways” signifying either ‘use’ or beyond ‘usage’, this latter being explained with the example of “medicine [which] has [the activity of maintaining] health and not just curing and treating” (EE ii 1, 1219a 8-23). For deeper elaboration on the particularities of the Greek words used please see Johnson, Monte Ransome. Chapter 3 “Teleological Notions.” *Aristotle on Teleology*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

origin of action – the source of motion, and not that for the sake of which – and that of choice, is desire and reason that is for the sake of something” (NE vi 2 1139a 31-5). Thus, the selection and performance of an action elaborates out of a source already in search of its purpose (Johnson 212).⁷ Focusing on choice in the selection of routes of teleological pursuit proves troubling for the characters. In systems rife with inequality and violence, neither intellectual escape nor physical journeys permit an effective means of reaching a viable *telos* but rather show how such cycles of violence and inequality become perpetuated on smaller, interpersonal levels, for example leading Smiley to shoot Casper as a means of fully integrating into Las Maras.

The previous chapter’s literary characters exemplified the utility of a transcendental *telos* even if they altered the end points based on their experiences as youth facing scenarios of clear injustices. Reaching this *telos* involved working within their own social matrices in order to gain social prowess that would, eventually, permit those characters to change the situations they found repugnant. Even those who merely followed the transcendental routes previously established by their society, namely Mario Vargas Llosa’s “Cachorros”, reached social maturity and actively chose to replicate the exclusion of Cuéllar. The transcendental *telos* for these characters involves a social replication that more often, in the books previously considered, involved replication through dialectical criticism, or to put it more simply through social activism and a

⁷ Aristotle extends this understanding of purpose to a consideration of human relations with particular concern for the elaboration of dominant power structure (ie: the slave and master model). Johnson explains that “the tension” existing in the paradox “stems from [Aristotle’s] attempt to apply a model of teleological explanations of organic parts and wholes to the very different case of relationships between organisms. To this end and as this chapter will presently show, the *telos* permits exploration of the individual’s dialectical process towards socially inscribed ends yet the model of *communitas* permits a more useful, Aristotelian approach to the broader social milieu in which this relationship may occur. See Johnson 237-240.

rejection of the normative behaviors established by the previous generations. The *telos* at work in these writings demonstrates an important social component in that the social matrix establishes such routes and permits certain dialectical deviations.

As earlier examples have shown, not all works of literature thematizing youth replicate these transcendental teleological projects. To this end, some consideration must be paid to individual considerations regarding the occupation of liminal spaces as a permanent or indefinite situation and particularly to the enactment of a lateral rather than a transcendental *telos*. Michel Foucault's work on teleologies and particularly the importance of the individual in the selection and praxes of the *telos* provides useful here. Like Aristotle, Foucault also examined questions of function and purpose and with particular concern regarding underlying questions of power and control. Prior to the early 1980s, the philosopher rarely spoke explicitly regarding the importance of ethics and by extension the idea of the *telos* to his work. At the same time, perhaps no one set of philosophical questions can be so readily found as the stimulus behind his genealogical explorations of questions such as crime, sexuality, and madness. To this end, as Gary Gutting argues "Foucault's work always had an ethical impetus" so that his work in turn attempts "to provide historical tools for those opposing an intolerable aspect of modern life" (Gutting 136). For Foucault while the "ethical emphasis is on an individual's construction of a self (an identity)" this must include likewise a consideration of "the role of ethical codes (rules of behavior), the force of which will vary depending on the manner in which a given individual is 'subjected' to it" (138). These would not necessarily be of primary importance for Foucault who puts greater emphasis on the construction of self but at the same time, as Gutting elaborates, "it is reasonable to suppose that he would see

[ethical codes] as general frameworks required for life within a given social structure” (138). As we see throughout *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] and also in *Sin nombre* [Nameless], the gangs operate with codes guiding behavior that also require other community members’ submission. Externally, in the gangs’ interactions with the world these interactions are thus couched in violence and the threat of violence. Internally, between gang members, violence maintains some role but is bolstered by a system of rewards and enticements such as we have already seen in the previous chapter.⁸

The consideration of Foucault’s idea of the *telos* further involves examining the he called the four “modes of subjectification,” or “the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code” (Foucault *Vol. 2*, 26). The first consideration for Foucault is the “*determination of the ethical substances*; that is, the way in which the individual has to constitute this or that part of himself as the prime material of his moral conduct” (26). These would entail the “various aspects of life relevant to ethical behavior” for example “in the case of

⁸ Michel Foucault elaborates on his idea regarding the construction of the self and the role of a teleological ethics in the third chapter of his Introduction to *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*. In this chapter, Foucault interrogates the individual’s formation in morality as necessarily part of the individual’s social sphere. He thus defines morality as “a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches, and so forth,” noting the existence of both explicit and implicit “rules and values” established and enacted by these institutions (Foucault 25). Foucault elaborates that these codes are

transmitted in a diffuse manner, so that, far from constituting a systematic ensemble, they form a complex interplay of elements that counterbalance and correct one another, and cancel each other out on certain points, thus providing for compromises or loopholes. With these qualifications taken into account, we can call this prescriptive ensemble a “moral code.” But “morality” also refer to the real behavior of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them: the word thus designate the manner in which they comply more or less fully with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction or a prescription; the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values” (Foucault *History Vol 2*, 25).

As such and given the diffuse and occasionally contradictory nature of these codes, the ‘moral codes’ elaborated upon by Foucault permit a certain degree of transgression or deviance. The important factor for Foucault is not, primarily, then the standard implemented externally but the actions and even more importantly the understanding of the individual.

sexual ethics, these would-be desires, pleasures, actions, virtues, etc.” (Gutting 138). The second consideration for Foucault then involves “the *mode of subjection (mode d'assujettissement)*; that is, with the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice” (Foucault, *Vol. 2*, 27).

He elaborates on two distinct praxes regarding marital fidelity, the first social and the second personal, writing

One can, for example, practice conjugal fidelity and comply with the precept that imposes it, because one acknowledges oneself to be a member of the group that accepts it, declares adherences to it out loud, and silently preserves it as a custom. But one can practice it, too, because one regards oneself as an heir to a spiritual tradition that one has the responsibility of maintaining or reviving; one can also practice fidelity in response to an appeal, by offering oneself as an example, or by seeking to give one's personal life a form that answers to criteria of brilliance, beauty, nobility, or perfection (27).

The third consideration involves “the forms of *elaboration*, of *ethical work (travail éthique)* that one performs on oneself, not only in order to bring one's conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior” (27). Examples of these praxes could then include “rigorous training through negative reinforcement, prolonged meditation on paradigm instances found in sacred texts, or imitation of admired mentors” (Gutting 138). The utility of this process for analyzing the group ethics as we find in the literature will be discussed after the following paragraph.

Foucault's idea of the *telos* connects to his consideration of "modes of subjectification" and comprises the fourth and final mode. The philosopher elaborates upon the concept, explaining that

Other differences, finally, concern what might be called the telos of the ethical subject: an action is not only moral in itself, in its singularity; it is also moral in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct. It is an element and an aspect of this conduct, and it marks a stage in its life, a possible advance in its continuity. A moral action tends toward its own accomplishment; but it also aims beyond the latter, to the establishing of a moral conduct that commits an individual, not only to other actions always in conformity with values and rules, but to a certain mode of being, a mode of being characteristic of the ethical subject. Many differences are possible here as well; conjugal fidelity can be associated with a moral conduct that aspires to an ever more complete mastery of the self; it can be a moral conduct that manifests a sudden and radical detachment vis-à-vis the world; it may strain toward a perfect tranquility of soul, a total insensitivity to the agitations of the passions, or toward a purification that will ensure salvation after death and blissful immortality (Foucault, Vol. 2 27-28).

Foucault's concept of the *telos* then involves a social connection of the individual's efforts directionally toward a circumscribed goal. His analysis suggests that "for an action to be 'moral,' it must not be reducible to an act or a series of acts conforming to a rule, a law, or a value" but rather must be in service to broader, socially defined goals.

The teleological ethics under consideration for our purposes involves the way in which individuals comport themselves as part of an immanent *telos*, the “substances” involved in an ethics of *communitas* belonging would be similar to Foucault’s sexual ethics and would thus involve actions, virtues, pleasures, and desires. Actions could involve “joining” through “positive” rites of initiation, such as we see occur in *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives] or in the gangs of *Sin nombre* [Nameless] or *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] In these cases, the “mode of subjection” are comparable if not almost identical in the case of the two films. At the same time, the modality of family as a pre-existing signifier for *The Brief Life of Oscar Wao* demonstrates how the acceptance of belonging without a clear way of permitting involvement or *communitas* (to be examined below) can inhibit individual relations to the broader system. The work, or the effort required for the transformation of self is, again, exemplified in the gangs’ initiation process. Read in this light, *Los detectives salvajes*’ [The Savage Detectives] in fact provides an elaboration upon the efforts made both at the time of the visceral realists’ apogee but also in the following decades and by the movement’s supporters, however brief their connection to the group. Moreover, the moments in which Oscar attempts to transform himself, through exercise or recommitment to personal grooming and hygiene, also attest to efforts of belonging. At the same time, as these fail to become transformative ethics these efforts in turn fail to support a cohesive movement. Finally, as Foucault’s description of the *telos* notes and as we see particularly in *Oscar Wao*, it is not enough for actions to be “moral” or “ethical” in and of themselves. Rather these values must both emanate from and reflect the producing society. Therefore, *Oscar Wao*’s doomed protagonist comes to understand the rules and morays of his context exquisitely

well but in his inability to make exceptions or to accept how power functions in the course of romantic and sexual relationships in both the United States and the Dominican Republic, his superb and exquisite commitment to these ethics put him on a trajectory for collision with the mores of his own family and society. On the other hand, the loose ethical binds of Bolaño's visceral realists permits them to evade the necessity of rigid definitions and therefore to propel the group forward even absent leaders or thinkers capable of defining the goals or praxes. This latter moment is illustrated perfectly when a character finally clarifies readers' questions regarding the group's purpose and so forth all from the *locus of enunciation* of a madhouse, therefore delegitimizing and obfuscating even the most useful of definitions.

In considerations of youth prior to this chapter, youth operated with the *telos* of achieving adulthood and therefore a moral or ethical maturity. Liminal modes are defined by their initial status as interstitial moments in service to the achievement of a more perfect state of being. When the subjects under consideration are youth, 'adulthood' and its achievement not only act as the *telos* of youth but may and have been used to mark the individual's progress towards its fulfilment. The following paragraphs critically examine this process as well as the concepts of maturity.

Literature regarding youth presents the moral *telos* for its characters as the attainment of maturity. At the same time, this idea of 'maturity' resisted clear definition in the 20th and 21st centuries for a large number of reasons that range from the basic to the abstract. On the most fundamental level, majority or maturity involves a socio-legal consideration. This consideration results from the 'universal' definition of adulthood as reached at the age of eighteen. The centrality of biological, (western) calendrical age

presents itself with confident certainty that, in turn, becomes “a shorthand, a code that evokes what amounts to an ‘epidemic of signification’.... Across numerous fields including education, law, medicine, psychology, and social work, as well as in popular culture, such as movies, television and literature” (Lesko *Act 4*). The initial problem with this central assumption involves the lack of clarity or elaboration on the differences separating social from biological age, or perhaps more technically social and legal maturity.⁹ We have already countered many examples such as the nameless girl from *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] or Ernesto from *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] wherein literature utilizes a precociously observant narrator whose biological and social age emerge as clearly distinct. A second but equally significant problem regarding this lack of elaboration involves the way that this ‘epidemic of signification’ regarding age functions in establishing norms that “declare the nature of youth” but also adult- and childhood. As Lesko explains the primacy of age as a “confident characterization” we assume youth to operate under a set of equally poorly elaborated definitions and concepts. Therefore, we must read children and youth as possessing a plurality of priorities and objectives, such as I have considered in the first chapter and its call for pluritopic hermeneutics in the reading of these characters’ priorities and objectives, and as this dissertation has attempted to do.

An additional consideration regarding the use of age as a particular marker regarding the achievement of the *telos* of maturity involves the universalization of ideas of ‘maturity’ with little attention to the genealogy of these ideas. Such an intellectual practice bears the risk of perpetuating what Nancy Lesko calls the “ideology of

⁹ I follow van Gennep and Turner’s discursive process here as they distinguish between the commencement of biological versus social puberty.

emergence,’ which is a belief that teenagers are naturally emerging and outside of social influences” (Lesko *Act 3*). By influences here, Lekso perhaps intends to point to broad social and historical influences rather than peer influences as a quick glance at stereotypes involving youth tends to over exaggerate the importance of peer influence at the expense of the broader complexities that an individual interacts with throughout their social matrix.¹⁰ In fact, as this project has consistently shown, the development of youth characters is heavily contextualized by social constraints as found diffuse throughout the social matrix.

If maturity is the transcendental *telos* of youth, then particular concepts and events are often used to examine an individual’s progress or lack thereof. Generally, since the 1800s, the two key factors involve either delinquency or precocity (precociousness) as marking individual progress. Literary and theoretical studies generally focus much greater attention on delinquency which has been defined as a “deviation” from statistically established norms (Lesko *Act 114*). Lesko follows Foucault in her examination of the ways measuring and marking statistical deviation functioned to normalize “panoptical time” in which any deviation would be read as marking grave social threats and could thus be enacted in service of broader ideas of social discipline (114). To this end, definitions of delinquency linked early to not only the perceived underdevelopment of some youths’ physical attributes but more seriously to considerations of criminality.¹¹ On the other end of the developmental spectrum from delinquency resides the idea of “precocity” which can be understood as statistically

¹⁰ See Chapter Three and also this chapter’s subsequent consideration of the forms of *communitas*.

¹¹ It is interesting to note that in contemporary usage, ideas of delinquency are applied to adolescents and to economic tardiness. In this way, the idea continues to put into practice ideas of temporal normalcy in both the individual and social contexts.

advanced, early, extra- or overdevelopment. Here too the original social ramifications of statistical deviation generally retained negative connotations: a young person's body that begins to display secondary sexual characteristics (breast development in girls, broadened chests or facial hair in young men) was understood as a thing to be feared if attained early as it could also lead to "early" sexual experiences, etc.¹² Moreover, intellectual precocity or the attainment of knowledge deemed socially unfit for a person at a specific age also became coded with ideas regarding the 'end of innocence' which further invokes an idea of sexual maturity even if a youth lacked sufficient information regarding human sexuality. Of the texts we consider, both *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] present girls whose knowledge and understanding of the world falls into this idea of precocious, yet at the same time both books evade traditional normative readings regarding the girls' respective innocence but rather problematize it within the context of the respective situation. Raped as a young girl, Lola lost her status as a virgin prior to puberty and its emphasis on this status. At the same time, in this act she was also robbed of her innocence which, as mentioned above, carries for girls a doubled implication regarding sexual purity. On the contrast, although not at all reticent in discussing sexuality in Chiapas, Rosario Castellanos' *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] deals explicitly with its narrator's actual innocence in the death of her

¹² Precocity and delinquency created difficult social situations for both male and female youths; however, even contemporary situations demonstrate the increased difficulty of young girls whose physical features may attract unwanted and even menacing attention. For example, when the narrator of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, mentions the childhood rape that Lola experienced it comes in the center of a discussion on the vulnerability extant in the simple fact of having a body as a child or adolescent. Other physical attributes aside, Lola's extremely long hair is blamed for catching the unwanted attention. One reading of this suggests her long hair as a marker of physical precocity, a distancing away from normalized childhood in which shorter hair would be more commonly found.

brother, for which she blames herself, as a result of her misreading of the causes of his death.¹³

As the previous chapter repeatedly showed, a certain amount of ambivalence remains regarding societies' definition of and attitudes toward 'maturity' or adulthood. All of the previously considered texts demonstrated the protagonists as aging towards legal majority and learning crucial, socially contextualized lessons that leave young protagonists in many cases more observant and more informed to issues of injustice relative to their family members. At the same time, the tone and occasional observations of these family members, characters such as Zoraida or the parents in Peri Rossi's book, comment on this progression and the values of the "mature" society with a tone of ambivalence and uncertainty remains in the system that nods in the direction to the manner in which these processes control the outcomes of the broader society and not necessarily to its benefit. One reason for the general ambivalence examined thus far can certainly be found in the complexities with which 'maturity,' 'delinquency,' and/or 'precocity' are understood as present to various degrees and as particularly linked to issues of sex, gender, and sexuality. For example, all of the female characters in *Bahín Canán* [The Nine Guardians] express their lack of satisfaction in the options provided by their societies while the principal male protagonist, the narrator's father, seeks state sanctioned justice via the same law and social praxes that perpetuate the women's discomfort. The several adults found in Peri Rossi's *La rebelión de los niños* [The

¹³ The narrating girl relates her brother's death to the fact that she and Mario hid the keys to the family chapel to prevent the priest from coming to visit. They did so as their catechism lesson the day before had highlighted the perils of hell and made a false connection between the Priest's administration of the children's first communion and a damnation to hell. By hiding the keys to the chapel, the children in effect created an animistic, indirect, positive rite to ward off these consequences.

Children's Rebellion] also express both explicit and implicit disgust regarding the necessity of performing traditional parental roles that require them to pass on practices, lessons, and values to which they do not fully ascribe. Nonetheless and despite this tenuousness of these social settings, the young characters in the previous chapter enact a transcendent *telos* leading to societally useful lives in which almost all of the previously studied these characters enact roles of social criticism. Yet not all young characters exemplify the transcendent *telos* found in *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] or *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians]. As this chapter will show, an immanent *telos* exists in which the *communitas* emerges as becomes strengthened in the context of societies that, for socioeconomic reasons, cannot provide sufficient options for individual development.

‘Aging out’ of adolescence should not only be meant to signify ‘coming of age’ or achieving the legal age of eighteen. On one hand, legal discourses already testify to a certain degree of flexibility regarding age. A youth under the age of eighteen who commits particular offenses will most surely be seen “as an adult” in the eyes of the law. At the same time this same flexibility is most certainly unidirectional as no cases exist in which, for example, a nineteen-year-old could be charged for particular offenses as a youth. Literature has long affirmed a lengthier liminal period between the innocence and protected phase of childhood and the independence of adulthood. While *Bildungsromane* have generally examined this phase and its breakdowns through 20th century works such as *The Catcher in the Rye* neuroscience more recently has shown that brain development continues at a steady pace from the onset of puberty through an individual's early 20s. To this end adolescence should be considered lengthier. At the same time, individuals

occupying this liminal space must contend with the ‘fiction’ of adulthood and the expectations enacted against them.

Communitas as Immanent Telos

In the previous chapter’s consideration of pre-matrix social organizations, we already engaged with three groups of liminal adolescents defined by their collective experiences in school: Amado’s “captains”, Vargas Llosa’s “cubs”, and the schoolboys in José María Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers]. As such, these groups begin to show how collective sub matrix units can form in the context of larger social matrices. On the surface, these groups seem to function as the *communitas* groups described by Victor Turner as they do temporarily form based on age and location. However, and as stated previously, particularities found in those groups limit their consideration as *communitas entities*. In exchange and as we will see in the following pages, because of their communal ethics and employment of particular “permanently” liminal *personae* this chapter’s texts elaborate a different schema of *communitas* from the previous chapter and more in line with the theory as initially suggested by Turner.

Victor Turner’s consideration of liminality emphasizes social cohesions apart from hierarchical social orders and structures. The anthropologist also noted that even the most amorphous of groups functions as a means of separation between the group and others and an element of regulation through the normalization of behaviors. As we have already seen, the groups at the heart of this chapter’s texts already take on this role to some extent in the communication of communal ethics. Here, as Turner explains, the “*Communitas* itself soon develops a structure in which free relationships between

individuals become converted into norm-governed relationships between social personae” (Turner 132).

In observing these types of self-organizations, Turner comes to argue that three basic forms of *communitas* exist. First, an “*existential* or *spontaneous communitas*” forms as spontaneously as temporary unit that permits its existence through the enactment of a sense of communal acceptance or rejection (132). This is the kind that forms in the schoolyard Arguedas describes. The second form, which Turner calls the “*normative communitas*”, forms when “under the influence of time, the need to mobilize and organize resources, and the necessity for social control among the members of the group in pursuance of [its] goals the existential *communitas* is organized into a perduring social system” (132). Thus, the second *normative* form emerges out of a preexisting ‘spontaneous’ *communitas*. This second form exists in “Los cachorros” [“The Cubs”] and which in enacting its “organizing” function fails to account for Cuellar. The third and final group Turner defines as the “*ideological*” *communitas* which he describes as “at once an attempt to describe the external and visible effects – the outward form... - of an inward experience of existential *communitas*, and to spell out the optimal social conditions under which such experiences might be expected to flourish and multiply” (132). Given this mechanism, Turner notes that this final term fits “a variety of utopian models of societies based on existential *communitas*” (132). Generally, this chapter will be dealing with these more developed *communitas* groups in that they have both internally structured organization and an impact on the external social conditions.

The three forms of *communitas* represent increasingly complex versions that originate from the first “existential” *communitas*. As a reminder, Turner locates the origin

of this form of *communitas* in liminal phases of rituals that have a tendency to minimize individual differences for the sake of the community. The *telos* of the *communitas* then involves social organization in time and for the sake of the group rather than the individual. Even in the context of religious groups – and Turner focuses his analysis on a western order (the “early Franciscans of medieval Europe) and a nonwestern group (the “Sahajiyas of fifteenth and sixteenth-century India) – social structures existing in this form tend to be “pragmatic and this-worldly” in that it focuses on immediate, practical solutions to challenges facing the group (134). Moreover, according to Turner’s analysis, the symbolic groups that represent or that “symbolize” the *communitas* tend to be “structurally inferior categories, groups, types or individuals” that “assume the attributes of the structurally inferior in order to achieve *communitas*” (133). Thus, groups and individuals seek out or replicate inferior social conditions rather than socially elevated organizations in the establishment of *communitas* groups. Particularly in the gangs but also, to a lesser extent in the literary movement of Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives] there is an element of base humility extant that speaks of this dynamic as described by Turner.

The *Telos* of Extended and Permanent *Communitas* Groups

Fernando Meirelles and Katia Lund’s 2002 film *Cidade de Deus* [City of God], Roberto Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives], and Cary Fukunaga’s *Sin nombre* (2009) all deal explicitly with *communitas* groups that are either in the process of forming/reforming or that engage in the process of initiating members. Greater attention will be paid below to the processes of initiation below but for the moment it serves to note that these gangs form similarly to the 2nd and 3rd order *communitas* groups as

described by Turner and as presented above. While the films evade providing explicit historical details relating to the gangs' subsequent formations, subtle markers demonstrate the conscious inclusion of historical information.

Cidade de Deus in effect tells the story of an evolution of *communitas* from a small, externally-focused and socially minded group of adolescents, O Trio Ternura ("The Tender Trio") that resided with their families in the Cidade de Deus neighborhood prior to the area's decline. This initial band commits petty robberies and pursues amorous sexual relationships with married women but, in general, they avoid the violence that would become ubiquitous later. The "Trio Ternura" does not seem to engage in normative behavior and their small numbers permits them a pragmatic social flexibility regarding their choice of capers. In fact, although they occasionally include the younger boys in their escapades, they do so while simultaneously discouraging the younger children from aspiring to be like them. Between themselves, the only common objective shared by the Trio Ternura involves their ability to successfully execute some rudimentary criminal endeavors and their common residence in the City.¹⁴ The favela's second generation gang is formed by many of the same children found playing soccer in the scene that introduces the first gang, O Trio Ternura. Of these previously introduced characters, Dadinho/Zé Pequeno [Lil Ze] emerges as the most powerful criminal player in the film's present because of his penchant for extreme violence and generally sociopathic engagement with the world. It is difficult to overstate the importance of Zé Pequeno's [Lil Ze's] character in bringing about the increasing brutality found throughout the film's

¹⁴ One of the reasons this group cannot be considered as one of the more involve *communitas* groups involves its lack of ritual for belonging or continuity. In fact, the older boys reticently permit the younger ones to participate in the raid of the motel as later described. This permission is not a 'rite of initiation' but functions more as a momentary collaboration which, at most, heralds a new first order *communitas*.

second and third acts. The character's willingness to kill anyone including young children and his general unpredictability which stems from a clear personal instability creates the atmosphere of terror found readily in these acts. Moreover, with the emergence of a strong, charismatic leader this generation of the gang also begins to demonstrate the characteristics of the 2nd and 3rd order *communitas* groups described above and particularly as found in the 'Boca de Fumo' organized by Dadinho/Zé Pequeno.¹⁵ Under Dadinho/Zé Pequeno, the Boca de Fumo regulates group behavior and contributes to the ideal social conditions (anarchy and violence) that permit the group's continual existence. Finally, although not as highly developed as the other two groups elaborated upon by the film, *Cidade de Deus* also subtly acknowledges the emergence of a third generational *communitas* group, referred to as the 'Caixa Baixa' or 'The Runts.' This large gang of young children rarely receives much direct attention and their extreme, highly visible youth accounts for one explanation of this dynamic. The Caixa Baixa [The Runts] play an important and highly symbolic role in the end of the film as they kill Zé Pequeno [Lil Ze] and, in the process, mark their own emergence as significant players in the film.¹⁶ Given the short amount of screen time dedicated to them and their general location in the film's periphery, the Caixa Baixa [The Runts] certainly seems to function as a *communitas* even if the purpose or level of development reached remains inaccessible to analysis.¹⁷

¹⁵ This concept is notoriously difficult to translate but refers to the hierarchical structures typically utilized by Brazilian narcotraffickers in a single location, such as the *Cidade de Deus* favela. For more information, please see Erika Robb Larken's *The Spectacular Favela: Violence in Modern Brazil*.

¹⁶ Given the general lack of specific elaboration, 'The Runts' function much more as a nebulous social milieu, described previously in this dissertation. At the same time, they reflect a historical reality and mark the emergence of the Comando Vermelho (Red Command) as a significant player in the local drug trade and also the next group that will bring even more extreme violence to the favela.

¹⁷ Time alone fails to account for the evolving violence found in the subsequent generations of *communitases* found in this film. Besides the emergence of an individual psychopath (Dadinho/Lil Ze) in the film's second generation and a collective violence in its third, other important external factors account

In his examination of the three *communitas* types, Victor Turner notes that religious order often function as the second two classes. As the *communitas* forms or becomes recognizable by the participants so the behavior of those within it also comes to be impacted. Turner writes “it is not only the charisma of the leaders that is ‘routinized’ but also the *communitas* of their first disciples and followers” (Turner 133). It results for Turner that, although the “*communitas* is often speculative and generates imagery and philosophical ideas” when examined in the context of religious orders, the “structure tends to be pragmatic and this-worldly” (133). Moreover, these groups tend to form when broader society finds itself in a state of flux. Turner notes that tribal initiations like the genesis of religious movements... both may possibly be said to exhibit a ‘liminal’ character, in that they arise in times of radical social transition, when society itself seems to be moving from one fixed state to another, whether the *terminus ad quem* [the endpoint or *telos*] is believed is believed to be on earth or in heaven (133).

The *communitas*’ *telos* thus may fix itself upon the lateral, human plane or in the evocation of a transcendent divinity and, in this situation, creates a communal state of liminality. Turning to both “religion and literature, in which normative and ideological *communitas* are symbolized, Turner finds that in these instances, the *communitas* comes to be represented by “structurally inferior categories, groups, types, or individuals” (133).

for the changed levels of violence and criminality of the film’s first act (O trio ternura) and its latter parts. The film never explains much of Lil Ze’s background and focuses instead on his emergence as the leader of the favela’s main “Boca de fumo” [The Smoke’s Mouth] or drug den but it occurs as the community’s drug of choice shifts from the alcohol and tobacco presented in the first generation to the cocaine trafficked by Lil Ze’s “Boca de fumo” [The Smoke’s Mouth] in the film’s second generation. *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] marks the upswing in violence as related to this change but also the ubiquity of heavy arms including the automatic rifles carried by youths in the film’s Brazilian poster. These guns were blurred for the film’s marketing in the United States.

Groups in these circumstances take on “the attributes of the structurally inferior in order to achieve *communitas*” (133). Thus, by selecting the lives of criminals, these groups select a structural inferiority that their age and liminal status already grants them as individuals. Banding together forms a *communitas* group that then becomes self-organizing as a means of preservation and security.

Victor Turner’s examinations of a diverse range of religious and secular *communitas* organizations permits him to examine various iterations of generally “structureless” domains (Turner 134). His analysis finds that when such groups are selected “almost at random” they demonstrate similar characteristics. For example, Turner finds that examining sources

... both religious and secular, a fairly regular connection is maintained between liminality, structural inferiority, lowermost status, and structural outsiderhood on the one hand, and, on the other, such universal human values as peace and harmony between all men, fertility, health of mind and body, universal justice, comradeship and brotherhood between all men, the equality before God, the law or the life force of men and women, young and old, and persons of all races and ethnic groups. And of especial importance in all these utopian formulations is the persisting adhesion between equality and absence of poverty (134).

Turner illustrates the absence of poverty in an exploration of Gonzalo's monologue from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in which the character imagines a “seamless and structureless” society that he would serve as magistrate and that would naturally meet the needs, wants, and whims of its inhabitants. While we have no such access to Ze

Pequeno's [Lil Ze's] desires we certainly can understand them as similarly expressed in his expansion of the rudimentary violence inherited from O trio ternura [The Tender Trio].

The gangs in both *Cidade de Deus* and *Sin nombre* function as examples of similar *communitas* forms in comparison with those described by Turner. The general schemes and the trajectory of such groups' developments was sketched out above in the elaboration of the three generations of *communitas* found in *Cidade de Deus*. In contrast with *Cidade de Deus*, the more recent *Sin nombre* depicts the functioning *communitas* of the Mara Salvatrucha gang.¹⁸ *Sin nombre* emphasizes an attitude of commonality found in the gang wherein the members understand that everything from guns to girlfriends belongs to the group rather than the individual. Moreover, as will be discussed in the section examining initiation below, while individuals both contribute to and partake of the communal properties violations of this 'social contract' lead to severe and often fatal ends. To these ends, the efforts undertaken by the film's protagonist to hide his girlfriend from the group already violates both the social norms and ideologies practiced by the gang. El Casper's death results from his killing of the local las Maras' leader but more also from these violations that subtly inform his character from the beginning. The camera that El Casper carries throughout the film represents a physical manifestation of this violation as he takes it from Benito/Smiley's cache of stolen goods that are intended for the gang. This social violation takes place in one of the film's earliest scenes and while the camera also represents El Casper's memory as he photographs key moments

¹⁸ The Mara Salvatrucha, referred to throughout the film as las Maras, is better known in the United States as MS-13. This dissertation will use the Mara Salvatrucha and las Maras nomenclatures in keeping with the film.

that will be inaccessible following his own death, these memories and the carrier violate the Maras' social code and thus also exemplify a violation of the *communitas* that dooms him as an individual.

Like the Maras, the Visceral Realists of Bolaño's *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives] predate the story to which they play such a crucial role. The group introduces itself to Juan García Madero, the novel's 17-year-old narrator, at a liminal moment in his life and formation as a poet. On the one hand, García Madero has begun a process of familial separation, extricating himself from his family's plans for his acquisition of a university title in law. As the biographies of many great writers of the previous and current century testify to such a decision, this choice in and of itself would have represented a more conservative dialectical continuity if García Madero continued on at his university rather than leaving it behind as well in the pursuance of a literary future with the Visceral Realists. The Visceral Realists thus present a different form of communal organization far more akin to the *ideological communitas* described above as they attempt to reject the hierarchical and standardized authority present in the university's poetry classrooms in order to pursue an immanent, liminal existence apart from these structures. The book's second section "Los detectives salvajes" [The Savage Detectives] from which the novel obviously derives its name, details the aftermath of the movement and, in essence, the (re)making of the movement and the group via the memory of those initially involved.¹⁹

¹⁹ AS a reminder, the novel's first and third sections deal with a few months between November 1975 and March 1976 respectively. The second section, in contrast, presents more than 50 characters' memories regarding the movement as compiled between 1976 and 1996.

Cidade de Deus [City of God's] three generations of gangs, the Maras, and Roberto Bolaño's Visceral Realists all represent 2nd and 3rd degree *communitas* groups that, in some ways, perdure their original purpose. As a result, these groups develop mechanisms that assist in responding to new challenges. Turner explains

Life in 'structure' is filled with objective difficulties: decisions have to be made, inclinations sacrificed to the wishes and needs of the group, and physical and social obstacles overcome at some personal cost.

Spontaneous *communitas* has something 'magical' about it. Subjectively there is in it the feeling of endless power. But this power untransformed cannot readily be substitute for lucid thought and sustained will. On the other hand, structural action swiftly becomes arid and mechanical if those involved in it are not periodically immersed in the regenerative abyss of *communitas*. Wisdom is always to find the appropriate relationship between structure and *communitas* under the given circumstances of time and place, to accept each modality when it is paramount without rejecting the other, and not to cling to one when its present impetus is spent (Turner 139).

In this lengthy passage, Turner shows how second and third order *communitas* groups come to be defined in time as they begin to face the difficult realities extant in their sometimes unanticipated endurance. The 'magic' he refers to hints at a simplicity found in the earliest iterations of the spontaneous *communitas*. For example, this innocence and simplicity exists in *Cidade de Deus*' sepia-toned and highly romantic presentation of the 'Trio Ternura' [The Tender Trio]. While this threesome is far from innocent as they rob,

copulate, and fight, their actions are always emphasized as innocent due to the fact that:

a) they hand over their ill-gotten goods to their families and the Cidade de Deus community; and b) their actions and the level of violence with which they operate is highly minimal in comparison to the later violence that would sweep the favela.

Additionally, Victor Turner's analysis presented in the lengthy quotation just above also explains the necessity of Dadinho/Zé Pequeno's emergence in the film's second generation. Dadinho/Zé Pequeno represents an individual capable of providing both the "lucid thought and the sustained will" required to organize and to sustain a violent organization in the chaos of the favela.

The Permanent Communitas as Evasive Telos

As we see in the films and literature and throughout his discussion of the iterations of the *communitas*, Victor Turner emphasizes how *communitas* groups function to respond to practical needs despite their sometimes utopian goals. The utopian nature of these objectives is perhaps difficult to acknowledge in the grimy and grim narratives highlighted by this chapter yet that does not deny their presence. Essentially, the two gangs and the *visceral realists* demonstrate social groups that attempt to self-organize and self-manage in response to and as a result of brutalities already present in the broader social spheres recognized by the individual works. The challenges they face are those experienced by many groups that must develop in relation to the world in which they exist. Turner explains this dynamic, writing that "spontaneous *communitas* is nature in dialogue with structure.... Together they make up one stream of life, the one affluent supplying power, the other alluvial fertility" (140).

Turner examines the symbiotic relationship between nature and social practice in his consideration of the Franciscan order. In Franciscan history and the order's commitment to poverty, Turner recognizes "one of the great instances" exemplifying the "developmental structure of the relationship between ideal and praxis, existential *communitas* and normative *communitas*" (Turner 140-141). One tool Turner acknowledges that allowed the success of the Franciscan order involved St. Francis' unique approach to establishing the order and in particular his use of "symbolic language" to explain concrete realities rather than to focus on abstract ideas" 141). The challenge for St. Francis and the order eventually became its size and the interpretation of St. Francis' writings as applied to larger and broader groups. Nonetheless, as Turner and history have shown, the Franciscans proved quite effective in establishing and maintaining a committed *communitas*.

By focusing on the Franciscan vows of poverty, Turner attempts to elaborate upon his idea of the Franciscans as a "permanent liminality" (Turner 145). He explains this idea through a lengthy analysis of the vows and imagery St. Francis considered in his writings. Turner himself argues that through these writings and in particular St. Francis' *Rules of 1221*

Francis appears quite deliberately to be compelling the friars to inhabit the fringes and interstices of the social structure of his time, and to keep them in a permanently liminal state, where... the optimal conditions inhere for the realization of *communitas* (145).

The conditions of this liminality Turner described much earlier in his work in the moments when an individual sacrifices aspects of his or her identity in order to acquire a

communal belonging. Turner following St. Francis takes this idea further here to the point of physical nakedness. Corporal nudity represents poverty, which for both Francis and Turner, involves “the literal absence of property” (146). Those who sought or retained property could thus be seen as violating the structures that permitted the group’s existence. The Franciscan example *par excellence* is found in the story of Judas who betrayed Jesus Christ for personal wealth and lost, in the process, the option of remaining in the *communitas*. As I have already mentioned above, *Sin nombre* [Nameless] explores a similar form of personal independence in El Casper’s actions and its consequences throughout the film.²⁰

If the teleological goal of some groups involves their maintenance over a period of time, then a certain amount of ideological and practical flexibility will most assuredly be required. The difficulty for these groups then emerges in the acknowledgement of material needs in the context of anti- or non-structural existential goals. In both *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] and *Sin nombre* [Nameless], the disparate gangs’ efforts to function as locally powerful, cohesive entities flounders when faced by these physical demands. Turner, again, proves useful in describing this dynamic when he writes that “property and structure are undis severably interrelated, and the constitutions of persisting social units incorporate both dimensions as well as the core values that legitimize the existence and forms of both” (Turner 146). Moreover, such a realization of the symbiotic and sometimes dialectical relationship between group and individual require a,

²⁰ Here again, the film’s subtle critique of capitalism collides with its elaboration of the *communitas* of the train. Casper’s attempts to maintain aspects of his individuality, including his keeping the camera and his girlfriend to himself, doom his future with the group, which in turn denies him an escape. For him, the train and the journey was only going to end in a termination perhaps of his current identity which could potentially have been exchanged for a fraudulent one in the United States or elsewhere in Mexico. However, this never becomes an expressed wish and instead, in the many pictures he takes on the journey, the pilfered camera becomes a testimony to his very existence.

sometimes painful, reevaluation facing the changing external factors. “This often seems like temporizing and hypocrisy, or loss of faith,” writes Turner before conceding that it is really no more than a reasoned response to an alteration in the scale and complexity of social relations, and with these, a change in the location of the group in the social field it occupies, with concomitant changes in its major goals and means of attaining them (147).

Examining how such changes come about and how they in turn may sometimes change the *telos* for initiates the following sections will analyze two particular case studies. In the first case, the generational changes in violence and the aesthetic choices utilized by *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] demonstrate how particular shifts introduced above and detailed below further respond to broader social changes that contextualize the film but that occupy background spaces. The second section analyses the Visceral Realist movement in its creation and memorialization through the first and second section of Roberto Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives].

Community Formation and the Aestheticization of Violence in Cidade de Deus

Cidade de Deus’ [City of God’s] opening scene introduces the film’s most important *communitas* group at a moment of evolution between its second and third generations. These opening moments also present nearly all of the film’s major characters through the use of a powerful visual metaphor: an emaciated chicken that escapes certain death in the gang’s frying pan only to end up in the middle of an armed showdown between Rio de Janeiro’s police and a group of heavily armed youths, the same group that had been planning to eat the chicken only moments ago. The staging of this scene posits the police and the gang on opposite sides of a street with the narrator nervously sharing the middle

space with the chicken. The narrator begins his story by interrupting this dramatic showdown in order to pull back both the camera and the story to what he sees as the story's actual beginning more than a decade prior.²¹

Cidade de Deus' [City of God's] dramatic introduction serves to introduce the narrator and to situate the audience in the place of reader/listener as described in the previous chapter but as an active, acknowledged participant in this film. While no character breaks the fourth wall to speak directly to the audience, the overlying narrator not only addresses the audience directly but also pauses the narration and the film's action frequently in order to contextualize, explain, or resituate the viewer relative to the story. In interviews, the film's main director, Fernando Meirelles, acknowledges appropriating the narrative circularity and particular film techniques from Quentin Tarrantino, a Hollywood director famous for such techniques, in order to enact this particular, challenging relationship between the film and its audience. As Meirelles spoke in an interview, in using occasional fractures within the narrative frame

A intenção aqui foi diametralmente oposta da de Tarantino, quando inverte os rolos de um filme para criar uma certa confusão estimulante na cabeça do espectador. A intenção dele é confundir, criando uma espécie de jogo com a audiência. A nossa era explicar, ser didático.

[The intention here was diametrically opposed to that of Tarantino. When Tarantino inverts these film roles he does so to create a certain,

²¹ This introductory interruption functions to cinematically introduce the narrating voice in a similar manner to the girl's interruption of her Nana in *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians]. In both the film and the novel, the narrator thus emerges from a violent *mise-en-scene* in order to bring order to the chaos. The imposition of this order structures both narratives and further speaks to the normalizing social matrices and the way youth will maintain this order while still showing its flaws.

stimulating confusion in the spectator's mind. His intention is to confuse, creating a type of game with the audience. Ours was to explain, to be didactic.]

As a result of this dynamic and as we saw in the previous chapter, the essential structure of the film's narrative attempts to establish and develop via the particular relationship to the work's viewer as well. In this sense, the building of community starts – at least with *Cidade de Deus* [City of God]– not within the text but between film and viewer. This occurs through the interruption when the narrating character breaks the fourth wall to address the viewer. At the same time, however, the extreme violence presented frequently in the film in scenes such as the one in which a psychopathic Dadinho/Ze Pequeno [Lil Ze] kills a very young child merits attention as it problematizes this relationship. To that end, Brazilian critics warned that the extreme violence displayed by the film could be seen as functioning “[como] matriz do imaginário coletivo, o cinema pode ser visto como produtor e refletor de identidades que evidenciam novos sujeitos na cena cultural” [as a matrix of the collective imaginary, cinema may be seen as the production and reflection of identities that testify to new subjects on the cultural scene] and thus that such violence should be considered cautiously. In fact, as we have seen with the directors' quotes, this matrix was attempting to make instructive use of the violence rather than elaborating upon a violent fantasy as these critics warned.

To understand the three generations of *communitas* found in *Cidade* and briefly introduced previously in the context of their own social and historical situation involves acknowledging the historical details only subtly present in the film. *Cidade de Deus* presents the origins not only of Cidade de Deus, the neighborhood that provides the

film's name, but also the construction of social groups within this context. Historically, the Cidade de Deus community was established in a with economic assistance from the United States in the 1960s in order to provide a new community for those wishing to escape the favelas.²² Initially, the favela housed more than 6,500 inhabitants – surpassing the similarly planned communities of Via Alianca and Via Kennedy (Zaluar). The population boomed when the military regime destroyed various favelas and thus forced inhabitants of other communities to seek refuge in Cidade de Deus. As Zaluar writes “a política foi implantada com força, durante o regime militar, houve mudança compulsória dos moradores das favelas e destruição imediata dos barracos vazios” [the policy was implemented with force during the military regime, when there was a compulsory removal of the favela dwellers and the immediate destruction of empty huts]. This can be seen in the beginning scenes as families arrive to the community and through the background construction of shops and restaurants.

Following the film's introduction, *Cidade de Deus* presents its first act in the community's early years. The film does not explicitly mention the broader historical and political situation impacting the country - namely the arrival of the Brazilian military dictatorship to power in Brazil, but it does show the results explicitly throughout the film. The film's initial scene shows the construction of the Cidade de Deus community as new streets, modest homes, and basic infrastructure arrive in the background as children and

²² While poor living conditions are by no means a 20th century phenomenon, the Brazilian favelas most certainly are. Soldiers returning from the Guerra dos Canudos (War of the Canudos) established the first favela around the end of the 19th century (“Favelas in Rio”). Promised financial recompense for their efforts in these wars, the soldiers returned and established informal dwelling places as they waited the promised returns. Over time the informal dwellings took on increasingly permanent status. While difficult to calculate given the informality and density of these populations, estimates from the Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) suggest that some 22% of the population of Rio de Janeiro live in the favelas many of which now have schools, social organizations, shops, and banks (Hurrell).

adolescents play soccer on a small field. These scenes unfold in the light a narrative nostalgia that reverberates in both the voice of the narrator who recalls these events with a tenderness not found in other parts of the story and also the use of a warm yellow sheen over the scenes taking place in the favela's early days.²³ The larger social community also emerges in a nostalgic, sepia-tinted, frame as family and neighborhood dramas take center stage. The film grounds itself in the experiences of a young protagonist, Buscapé [Rocket], who grows up in the favela and who bears witness to many acts of violence for which the favela would later become known. Buscapé [Rocket], introduces himself as the film's narrator in the previously analyzed opening scene. He wanders into the no man's land between the gang and the police force, standing symbolically next to the chicken. Through his narration, Buscapé pauses the action so that he can put into context the brutal confrontation that is about to occur. This scene thus demonstrates, as we have seen, the use of narrative interruption, the insurrection of the margin into the center in that the gang's confrontation with the state happens (at last) in the central streets as opposed to the periphery of the favela, and the liminal as Buscapé [Rocket], situates himself in the particular moment of intersection as an adolescent between these spatial and social groups.

The violence of *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] and that of the favela which gave the film its name informs and contextualizes every aspect of the lives and stories revealed within the respective works. The film's characters cannot be understood, therefore, on any serious level without a consideration of this violence. As an aesthetic choice, the filmmakers acknowledged in their stylistic decision to introduce and develop the film's

²³ See Images VII and VIII on page 253.

main characters through both visual and narrative fragmentations a symbolic debt to the cinematic work of Quentin Tarantino, a Hollywood director whose films make frequent use of both visual and narrative fragmentation. Brazilian film critics have pointed to the “circularidade da narrativa” [narrative circularity] at work in the film in both the macro-narrative and within the work’s minor narrative arcs (Folha 2002). Yet even in this choice of style the reasons for its selection vary widely. For Tarantino, blood and violence becomes part of an artistic palette which he uses to tell his stories, in contrast, for Meirelles and Lund, the violence as well as its causes, victims, and social consequences is the subject. Thus, despite the narrative and cinematically stylistic similarities explicitly shared by *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] and Tarantino’s work, the acts of violence that emerge as framed in this could not be more distinct and by using a familiar frame – the Hollywood glamorization of extremely stylized and gratuitous violence – to present a story of the realities of Brazilian violence, the filmmakers attempt to showcase the differences revealed as such.

Brazilian film and literary critics have been cautious in their acknowledgment of the links between the violence of films such as *Cidade* with the actual violence found in Brazil’s favelas. Aline Silva Correa Maia, a professor and research at the Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora Brasil, for example, decries the lack of specificity with which the film treats its spatial limitations. It takes a keen eye, for example, to distinguish between the scenes set in the titular favela and when the characters may be found elsewhere in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, as Maia notes, this lack of spatial clarity absolves Rio’s middle and upper classed from connecting with the violence of the slums – violence that results from the increased drug trade and specifically from the trafficking of cocaine

through the favelas and by its youth towards the veins of the *carioca* elites. Thus even if critics accept the filmmakers' assertions that this violence should not be considered gratuitous in the manner of Hollywood films neither do they accept it as a fully just depiction of the violence.²⁴

While violence already exists in the Cidade de Deus community prior to its emergence as a favela, the nature of the violence, as well as some of its causes and perpetrators differs significantly between the film's first and second acts. Buscapé [Rocket] narrates this change focusing first on the existence of the original "gang", O Trio Ternura [The Tender Trio] as comprised by his brother, Marreco [Goose], and two of his friends: Alicate [Clipper], and Cabeleira [Shaggy].²⁵ Armed with pistols, the trio robs a gas truck and plans other, minor, heists. In the gas truck robbery, the adolescents take the driver's money as community members relieve the truck of its cooking gas. In general, the Tender Trio function as a Robin Hood gang, redistributing their ill-gotten plunder into the community which, in turn, retains an ambivalent relationship with the trio. The uneasiness of this relationship is best revealed in the conversations that happen in the narrator's home. His father angrily rejects his older son's violence and reacts with fury when he discovers a gun in the home. At the same time, both boys realize their father's profession as a fishmonger cannot sustain the family financially nor is it either of their goals to follow him into this line of work.

²⁴ Maia makes the useful point that this violence can be read as part of a center/periphery narrative in which the elites at the social centers – in Rio de Janeiro's posh neighborhoods of Copacabana, Ipanema, and Leblon – may distance themselves from the violence, poverty, and social stagnation of the social periphery.

²⁵ For the English names, I am using the versions presented in the film's English subtitles rather than more precise Brazilian translations as these names will be more familiar for those familiar with the film but without an understanding of Brazilian Portuguese.

Two specific events mark the shifts between the three generations of *communitas* presented in the film. The first event coincides with the arrival of serious violence in the favela. This significant event occurs at the end of the first act when the Tender Trio decides to rob a motel with Buscapé and Dadinho acting as lookouts. Much like Tarantino's films, this central event is presented twice in the film: the first time follows the major events as the Tender Trio breaks into the hotel and robs various couples. An important factor may be lost in translation to non-Brazilians viewing this scene. In Brazil, motels are cheap hotels known to be frequented by couples in pursuit of sexual, romantic trysts and extramarital affairs. The nudity displayed within the motel throughout the robbery scene further supports this understanding of the space as already marginal to Brazilian society. As a result, robbing a motel rather than a hotel, would retain distinct implications understood by a Brazilian audience and would be somewhat more socially excusable as the people within the hotel are generally understood to be already in a state of social transgression. Nonetheless, the Tender Trio escapes and little would come of this robbery except that all the robbery victims end up dead, a mystery initially unaccounted for in the presentation of the film's first pass at following the narrative. Later in the film, in a segment depicting Dadinho/Ze Pequeno's [Lil Ze's] emergence as the second generation's charismatic central figure, the film reveals that it was Dadinho/Ze Pequeno's [Lil Ze's] who entered the motel and brutally massacred all of the inhabitants for no apparent reason other than a penchant for such inexplicable violence. This moment shifts the film's crimes from somewhat petty, minor crimes to the extreme violence that comes later.



Image VII²⁶



Image VIII²⁷

An additional marker of the arrival of this second generation involves a switching of the film's colors from the warm nostalgia found previously with the cold realities of the second and third generations (see Images VII and VIII, above). As the reader will note, the colors mark a clear change in visual tone that, in turn, shifts the narrative tone as well. In both cases, the sepia-tinted warmth with which Buscapé [Rocket] talks about his childhood and the Trio Ternura [Tender Trio] gives way to a steely and colder reality highlighted by the blues used in the second act.

The second event marking the emergence of the third generation of *communitas* involves the scene presented in the film's introduction and conclusion. The narration presents the children of Caixa Baixa [The Runts] as a particularly vulnerable part of the film's background. The children's age and numbers leave them defenseless in confronting the more powerful, older gangs. This does not mean they are fully innocent either. In a particularly brutal scene, the Caixa Baixa children rob a small store while talking grandiosely of becoming powerful and important like Dadinho, who is then known as Zé Pequeno [Lil Ze]. This scene takes a crucial turn when the children run into Zé Pequeno [Lil Ze] who shoots one child in the foot before assassinating an even younger child. In no other scene of this film or perhaps of the works under consideration

²⁶ Image source: de Meirelles, Fernando and Katia Lund, et. al. *Cidade de Deus*. Miramax Lionsgate, 2004.

²⁷ Image source: de Meirelles, Fernando and Katia Lund, et. al. *Cidade de Deus*. Miramax Lionsgate, 2004.

in this project does age play as important or as dynamic of a role as this one. By presenting the children first as objects for the audience's censure and only moments later as vulnerable victims, the film makes obvious the shifting social standards applied to children and adolescents. Jorge Amado highlighted this dynamic in his chapter entitled ("As luzes do carrossel" [The Lights of the Carousel]) when the reality of the boys' youth comes to be contrasted with the social understanding of their action and potential.²⁸ This scene also accounts for the emergence of the Caixa Baixa [The Runts] as the next generation of the *communitas* group in the favela. Unlike Zé Pequeno, this group does not need one individual, charismatic leader and, in fact, the film never explicitly names any of the Caixa Baixa [The Runts] boys. Moreover, while vengeance for the death of their friend seems a logical explanation for their decision to kill Zé Pequeno [Lil Ze] it is equally likely that this decision results from their desire to achieve power, an objective voiced prior to the death of their compatriot. They mark their emergence as the next generation's more violent *communitas* in the killing of Zé Pequeno [Lil Ze] and thus emerge relative to the previous generations as a more unified, less hierarchical *communitas*.

It is perhaps easy to lose sight of the distinct reasons for the violence *Cidade de Deus* takes great pains to present. Violence infuses the film yet it is important to note its distinct forms and causes in order to examine the way it generates distinct results. First and foremost, the film introduces this violence through a heavy-handed metaphor with the opening credits' vignette involving the chicken escaping the frying pan only to find itself haplessly in the middle of a gunfight. This metaphor provides such a central image

²⁸ See Chapter Three.



Image IX that the chicken is presented on the film's original poster (see Image IX on left).²⁹ Tracing violent images, the scene gives way, quickly, to a confrontation between the film's gang and a Brazilian police force that only comes to be explained and resolved in the film's final moments. The narrative only eventually reveals in an intercut flashback that Zé Pequeno [Lil Z] bears the full responsibility of this act.

It is this violence that marks the distinct emergence of three distinct and recognizable *communitas* groups while at the same time this process generates liminal geographic and identity spaces in the film. The elaboration of these spaces requires a general knowledge of the geography present but not specified in the film. While it situates itself initially in the favela Cidade de Deus, later scenes draw faint lines between the dense violence found therein and the broader city of Rio de Janeiro. Moreover, these scenes work to highlight Buscapé's [Rocket's] escaping of the favela even as he rarely mentions his own purposes for doing so. Buscapé [Rocket] and a few other characters navigate the interstitial spaces and the film highlights this precarious balance again in its choice of tonal color schemes. As Image 6 shows, in this scene, Buscapé and his love interest escape the cold reality of the favela and steal a few moments of youth on one of Rio's storied southern beaches. The blues and yellows present in this film represent a precarious balance and possible outcome for Buscapé.

The Telos of the Communitas and the Lengthening of Adolescence

²⁹ Cinematerial.com. *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] <https://www.cinematerial.com/movies/cidade-de-deus-i317248>

For both Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep, the examination of liminality in a range of pre-industrial communities along with modern and even industrial groups permitted these scholars a means to ask the question of how individuals come to occupy liminal positions that are traditionally transitory for periods of increasing duration. In combination with the consideration of the evolving, liminal *communitas* this exploration permits the study of both the ideologies and praxes that guide the choices made by individuals and groups. Moreover, this course of thinking permits their respective projects a means of commenting upon the way this period may come to lengthen and elaborate as individuals or groups identify an immanent *telos* that permits them a more enduring stay in a phase or situation initially conceptualized as transitional.

As this dissertation has shown, several discrete factors may lead to a lengthening of the social period of adolescence. Already in Chapter Two of this dissertation we examined an array of such causes including most generally the importance of other social projects such as, for example religious or military service. As we saw with ancient Greece, Trojan women filled their post-menstruation and pre-marital time with physically exhausting but socially circumscribed activities while Tawantinsuyu also demanded particular labor contributions or social sacrifices from young men and women prior to marriage. Colonial Lima also required young people's religious chastity and religious obedience and in this way also regulated sexuality and ordered the phases of life. All of these factors extant in pre-industrialized societies already begin to account for a lengthening of adolescence as a period of time between the onset of physical and social puberty and a socially recognized age of marriage.

With the industrialization of national and regional economies and the attendant consolidation of populations into urban centers, adolescence has lengthened even more significantly. This period became one of increasing education and created in many societies a collective consciousness not of adolescents but of students. Student movements in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Europe at once affirm the importance of young people and their social involvement while simultaneously enacting a particular liminality against this group such that its power may remain ever in check and in service to the stabilized continuity of the respective student group's society and established social order. The liminality of "student" thus is one terminated by the acquisition of the educational title. Contemporary literature most often elaborates upon adolescence and later youth as years of schooling and education but few of the books we have considered formally value this period. The fact that the adolescent protagonists of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* meet in college is mentioned in passing and some scenes take place in the dormitories and social spaces of Rutgers University but otherwise formal education remains very much in the background.

Examining the shifting *telos* of adolescence and in particular the manner in which certain *communitas* groups that include large numbers of youths and adolescents requires a reexamination of the liminal process as relating to the *telos* of the *communitas*. This concept was previously introduced in this dissertation's first chapter but following the addition of the later concepts, particularly in the consideration of the *communitas* and its *telos*, necessitates at least a passing reconsideration of the concept. Turner posits all three forms of the *communitas* as forming once the individual has engaged with the liminal processes. The ensuing immanent "anti-structure" reorganizes social bonds and permits a

resultant reorganization of both individual in relation to the *communitas* which, in turn, retains a distinct place in the broader, containing society. *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] and *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives] both took as central themes the formulation and reorganization of these *communitas* structures whereas and *Sin nombre* [Nameless] presented an example of the group already formed.

Initiation, Naming, and the Communitas

In *Sin nombre* [Nameless], *Cidade de Deus* [City of God], *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives], and *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* individual characters set aside aspects of their identity in the effort to assimilate to particular *communitas* social structures. These works thus at once validate the processes described by Turner and van Gennep while also elaborating upon distinct praxes found in localized contexts. Above all, the joint reading of these four disparate texts demonstrates the importance of processes of initiation, instances of (re)naming, and the elaboration of immanent *telos* as a socialized norm for the liminal individual.

Cary Fukunaga's 2009 film *Sin nombre* [Nameless] focuses directly on the migration experiences of its two adolescent protagonists and in the process creates two distinct pictures of *communitas* groups that eventually clash: the *communitas* of the Mara Salvatrucha gang, previously elaborated upon in this chapter and the experiential (or 'spontaneous') *communitas* established in the shared experience of the migrants making their way to the United States on the top of a freight train. The two main characters whose experiences permit us an engagement with both the liminal nature of the groups and the individual experiences involved in these stories are El Casper, the member of the Mara Salvatrucha gang introduced previously in this chapter, and Sayra, a Honduran girl

whose mother has recently died. While these two characters undoubtedly function as the film's protagonists, the shared experience of migration to the United States situates them as part of a *communitas* formed by this difficult experience and shared, to some degree, by them with the other migrants who ride La Bestia ("The Beast") towards the United States.³⁰ The film's title nods towards how names and identity may be sacrificed during for the sake of the *communitas*' formation. It does so by referring, initially, to El Casper whose name and identity are crucial to the film's analysis while ultimately, as the ensuing analysis will show, the creation of a shared *communitas* forged through a series of difficult, trans-border experiences ultimately robs all of the characters of both their names and, for some, of their lives.

Sin nombre [Nameless] opens with El Casper staring at a wall adorned with a large-scale picture of autumn leaves falling from trees. The scale of this image – it takes

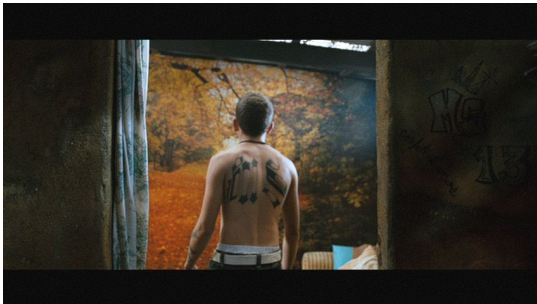


Image XI

up the entire screen for several introductory seconds – frustrates an initial placing of the characters as it is easily read as a northern clime where such scenes would be possible

(see Image XI, on the left).³¹ An intertitle

helpfully corrects the initial image, identifying the setting as the city of Tapachula in the

³⁰ La Bestia or "The Beast", also known as "El tren de la muerte" [The Train of Death], refers to a series of freight trains that traverse Mexico and Central America en route to the United States. Estimates suggest that around 500,000 migrants use the tops of these trains annually in order to make at least part of the journey from Central America or southern Mexico to the U.S. border. Given the hazards of riding on top of these trains, death, amputation, and injuries due to falls are not uncommon. For more information including maps of the common commercial routes, see Rodrigo Dominguez Villegas' article "Central American Migrants and "La Bestia": The Route, Dangers, and Government Responses" at MigrationPolicy.org.

³¹ Image Source: Fukunaga, Cary J., et al. *Sin nombre*. Widescreen. California: Focus Features, 2009.

southern Mexican state of Chiapas.³² In the juxtaposition of images with the frequent use of intertitles and the occasional overlying of maps showing the journey's progress, the film at once highlights location while simultaneously blurring situation to focus on the journey in passage. This physical journey contextualizes the interpersonal one at the center of the film's narrative.

Focusing on El Casper's names and other recognizable markers connected to his identity permits a useful means of entrance into analysis of both the film's plot and its creation of a *communitas* structure in which the identities of its major characters come to be erased. Long before El Casper speaks his body and body language already attest to an assertion of identity that locates him in connection with the MS-13 gang. Rather than opening with a monologue of any sort, a large tattoo bearing the letters 'MS', takes up the expanse of the young man's back and speaks volubly of his belonging to the infamous group (see Image XI, above). As scenes involving the Maras unfold it becomes clear that the size and number of such tattoos indicate membership and involvement in the gang as the few older members of the gang covered by tattoos so that other identifiable facial or body features become lost in the literal branding of the young men's bodies.

Although it includes a short segment introducing Sayra, the film's other protagonist, the first 10 minutes of *Sin nombre* [Nameless] focuses much more extensively on El Casper and the elaboration of his context. In this segment, the audience watches as he fulfills various gang-related obligations: a cash pickup, evaluating a young 'homey's' ill-gotten gains, and beating the same young boy as part of the latter's initiation into the Maras. In all this time, El Casper barely speaks more than a word or

³² This border state is also the setting of Rosario Castellanos' works, *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations] and *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians].

two until a later scene finds him with his girlfriend, Martha Marlen. In this scene not El Casper only begins to speak more fully as Martha plays with a miniscule tattoo bearing her initials that El Casper has on his chest. Thus, even as the audience comes to hear El Casper's voice for the first time we are simultaneously initiated to the dangerous double life that El Casper leads. On the one hand, he fulfills his duties to las Maras seriously, letting his large tattoos speak for his membership to the fearsome gang. At the same time, it is the tiny tattoo whose newness marks El Casper's skin with a red irritation that must be covered and separated from the previously elaborated gang alliance. The tiny size of the Martha Marlen tattoo contrasts markedly with the ostentatiousness of the gang tattoos in general. Overall, this introductory material presents El Casper as a quiet and serious albeit active gang member. The film uses these early moments subtly establish two distinct social spheres for El Casper: the densely populated violent world defined by the Maras and his intimate relationship with Marta Marlen. Though never discussed or shown again, El Casper's tiny, new 'MM' tattoo marks his difference from the gang and in this way it displays a separation extant in the character already at the film's beginning. El Casper attempts to separate his social spheres, donning body- and tattoo-covering clothes when he seeks out Martha and removing the concealing attire when he returns to the gang. On the other hand, and simultaneous to El Casper and Marta's developing relationship, El Casper simultaneously involves himself in the initiation of Benito/Smiley to the Maras.

Beyond establishing the distinct personalities and fundamental elements relating to the identities of the film's two adolescent protagonists, El Casper and Sayra, *Sin nombre*'s first act establishes parallel processes of initiation that impact these

protagonists in very different ways. The film includes quick, private moments for both characters before placing them in the context of their own social spheres. To this end, most of El Casper's early scenes involve his assistance with Benito's initiation to the Mara gang. This initiation, like the initiation of the migrants to be discussed below, follows a series of sequential steps that El Casper explains to Benito and largely for the audience's benefit as the film opens with the young (10- to 12-year old boy) already having fulfilled some obligations. To become fully initiated to the 'Maras', Benito presents El Casper a bag of presumably stolen electronics, from which El Casper pockets a digital camera. A group of Maras then beats Benito/Smiley as a gang leader counts to thirteen, an important number in the Mara's world. This beating is the most obvious "Rite of Initiation" viewed in this dissertation in that it provides a positive, indirect rite through which belonging becomes elaborated. However read alongside the other sequential "rites" enacted by the Maras we begin to see how exclusive these rites actually function to distance a center so that all the young men seek belonging that will ultimately become frustrated by either any attempts to preserve things for the individual (such as what El Casper does with Marta) or to escape, as we see with the no longer active Chavala gang member who is killed despite having left his gang a while ago.

The film presents these next phases of initiation through fragments that it asks the audience to reconfigure. While the audience follows Benito/Smiley and El Casper from the beating to the train station to Marta Marlen's house to the Mara's stronghold, the Destroyer, the actual purpose of this trajectory is not immediately known. It is only upon arriving to the gang headquarters that El Casper mentions to Benito that he must kill a gang member from the Chavalas, rivals to the Maras, in order to be fully initiated to the

Maras. The pair had, apparently, been tasked with hunting such an adversary at La Bombilla, the local train station. When they return to the Destroyer without having completed this task, Lil' Mago, the local Mara Salvatrucha leader, informs them that another Mara had caught a Chavala, and Benito/Smiley then assassinates him with El Casper's assistance. Again, the majority of these actions require positive, direct engagement that would mark belonging and commitment to the group.

Full initiation into the Mara Salvatrucha continually evades the grasp of both Benito/Smiley and even El Casper. Although by the end of the first act, Benito/Smiley has progressed through the beating and killed his first Chavala, he still must share a gun as he has yet to earn his own. Additionally, the Maras have yet to assist him in acquiring a girlfriend or a sexual conquest of his own. He only eventually receives a firearm when he requests to hunt El Casper after the latter kills Lil Mago in order to save Sayra from being raped.

Along with van Gennep's ritual divisions as evidenced in the gang initiation, Turner's steps to a *communitas* identity may be easily found in Sayra's process of assimilating to life as a migrant. Like El Casper and Benito/Smiley, initiation includes an element of separation. Piecing together Sayra's family matrix requires close attention to the film's first scenes. The movie opens on Sayra staring out at a dense urban landscape which the subtitles reveal to be Tegucigalpa, Honduras. The character then descends a staircase where characters eventually revealed to be her father and her uncle Orlando speak with an elderly woman about the former's United States-based family. The first separation then uncovers itself in the disintegration of the family unit. While it is never revealed if the family separated due to the father's acquisition of a wife and children in

the United States such a story would hardly be unusual for an illegal immigrant living in the United States and lacking the ability to return to his or her home country. Sayra seems not to know her biological father, or at least not to know him well and his remarks regarding her age (“Ay, ya es señorita” [“Wow, she is already a Young lady”] *Sin nombre* [Nameless]) underscore a lengthy absence and a distant relationship. In addition, the film makes a fleeting reference to the death of Sayra’s mother and highlights the lack of social options for the young girl in her home country. Given these previous incidents, Sayra already recognizes a sense of independence that contextualizes her later choices to stick up for Casper and to, in some ways, make her way to the United States alone. Again, the moments marking a transition from childhood to adolescence or adulthood are missing – there is no mention of a Quinceañera or of communion status – at the same time and like *Oscar Wao*’s Lola, Sayra possesses an adolescent body that attracts unwanted sexual attention and thus threatens her ability to make the already unsafe journey from Central America and across the U.S. border.

Separated from a stable home and family past, Sayra joins her father and paternal uncle in their immigration to the United States via Mexico. The second phase of her initiation then involves a lengthy walk through the dense and humid jungle. This phase also includes both Sayra and her uncle’s learning not the route nor the particularities involved in the migration but the memorization of the father’s wife’s phone number in the United States so that, in the eventuality that they become separated, they may reach their destination alone. When the small family passes into Mexico, they are immediately apprehended by Mexican immigration agents who detain and search them, a process that requires the newly reunited family to strip in each other’s presence. While a cut in the

narration obscures precise details, the ensuing scene reveals the family together in Mexico, at La Bombilla, the previously introduced train station, without money to buy food. The third phase of initiation then begins as Sayra, and her uncle Orlando, begin to learn particular, experiential lessons attached to their immigration such as how to hide resources from officials as well as the other difficulties and challenges inherent to this process. Here, while Sayra's father has made the dangerous trip at least once before, he proves of little help in explaining things prior to necessity. For example, he presumably could and would have helped his family hide their money from the immigration agents yet he fails to do so. While the film does not explain this lack of communication, it could certainly represent a contagious, negative rite in that avoiding the mention might function superstitiously as a means of avoiding conflict with the police. Such superstitions and taboos can most certainly be found in the behavior of the migrants making the dangerous journey.

Once aboard "La Bestia" [the Beast] and perhaps already prior to this leave-taking, Sayra's age and gender come to represent an additional challenge to the family's immigration. Prior to the film's second act particular dangers inherent to the journey – hazards such as falling from the train or robbery at the hands of the gangs who trolled the trains' rooftops – had already been glossed in the migrants' conversations. It is only after a migrant falls from the train and a few members of Mara Salvatrucha (including Lil Mago, El Casper, and Benito/Smiley) have robbed the migrants that Sayra's vulnerability becomes exposed when Lil Mago sees her and moves to raping her.³³ Facing the reality

³³ The film makes Lil Mago's intentions to rape Sayra evident and moreover had already presented the gang's use of rape in a previous scene when he attempts to rape Marta Marlen and causes her death in the process.

of Sayra's rape, her father and uncle freeze, powerless in front of the gang member's violence. It is only El Casper's intervention that ultimately protects Sayra. Sayra's protection comes at a high cost, however, as El Casper must now flee with the migrants to escape the death that his killing of Lil Mago most assuredly would precipitate.

Like *Sin nombre* [Nameless], Roberto Bolaño's 1998 novel *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives] also deals with processes of initiation that relate an individual to the *communitas*. Formally, the novel does so through the interpolation of different characters' perspectives which leads to the creation of a fragmentary narrative centered around specific protagonists. The book opens by introducing its seventeen-year-old narrator, Juan García Madero, at the moment of his initiation to an incipient literary movement called "el realismo visceral" [visceral realism]. Juan Garcia Madero's relationship to the literary movement, and, more importantly, the movements 'leaders', Arturo Belano and Ulises Lima, structures to unite the book's pieces. Garcia Madero's privileged observation point permits him to interact directly with the 'visceral realist' movement which simultaneously formulates both within and because of his literary gaze. The narrator's diary, which comprises the novel's first and third parts, 'Mexicanos perdidos en México' [Mexicans lost in Mexico, 1975] and 'Los desiertos de Sonora (1976)' [The Deserts of Sonora, 1976], thus recounts the group's formation as well its conclusion, of sorts, in the Sonoran Desert.

Questions of initiation and becoming permeate the first section of *Los detectives salvajes*. In the first journal entry, which doubles as the novel's opening lines, the yet to be named narrator writes

He sido cordialmente invitado a formar parte del realismo visceral. Por supuesto, he aceptado. No hubo ceremonia de iniciación. Es mejor así (Bolaño 13).

[I've been cordially invited to join the visceral realists. I accepted, of course. There was no initiation ceremony. It was better that way (Bolaño/Wimmer 3)].³⁴

This comment, which bears the date of the 2nd of November 1975, serves to at once orient and simultaneously alienate the reader from the narrator and its place in Mexican letters, in keeping with the sections title, 'Mexicanos perdidos en México, 1975' [Mexicans lost in Mexico, 1975]. Formally, the journal entries communicate a single, identifiable narrating voice while the text itself, although replete with formal language introduces an idea alien even to those with a deep knowledge of the Mexican literary establishment and its evolution. This simultaneous tension of recognition and alienation infuses the text through its mixture of actual historical figures such as Octavio Paz, representations of historical figures, and 'entirely' fictional characters such as the chronicler whose journal makes up the novel's first and third sections. Despite this uncanny array of characters, from its opening lines, 'Mexicanos perdidos México' [Mexicans lost in Mexico, 1975] illustrates the creation of an ideological *communitas* which self-organized around its aesthetic ideals as well as the age and life situations of its members.³⁵

³⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all English translations of Bolaño's novel come from Natasha Wimmer's 2007 translation. Bolaño, R. *The Savage Detectives*. Natahsa Wimmer, trans. Picador, 2007.

³⁵ This introduction also serves to show how even in their avoidance rituals come to play a role. In mentioning that there was no ceremony and it was better that way, Juan Garcia Madero still marks the space of ritual. In essence the rest of the novel acts as his means of joining the group.

The initial pages of *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives] follows Juan Garcia Madero's initiation to and integration within the visceral realist group. However, because the adolescent narrator does not understand the nature of the group he has joined and admits as such ("No sé muy bien en que consiste el realismo visceral" (Bolaño 13) [I'm not really sure what visceral realism is (Bolaño/Wimmer 3)]). The name of the movement itself somewhat evade Garcia Madero who notes that they were also called the "real visceralistas o viscerrealistas e incluso vicerrealistas como a veces gustan llamarse" ["viscerealists, or even viscerealists" (Bolaño/Wimmer 3)]. Essentially it is the second section that finalizes these processes of initiation in showing how the group behaved over time.

Much like in *Cidade de Deus* [City of God], *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives] tells a story of intergenerational conflict. In an interview about the book, Roberto Bolaño spoke of this schism and how the novel "intenta reflejar una cierta derrota generacional y también la felicidad de una generación, felicidad que en ocasiones fue el valor y los límites del valor" [intends to reflect a certain generational defeat and also the happiness of a generation, a happiness that was, on occasion, bravery and bravery's limit] (Bolaño "Acerca de" 203-204). Read on its own, this separation of youth from older generations is hardly unique to Bolaño's writing, as such generational divisions found throughout the (auto)biographies of writers and artists as well and are equally familiar elements found within novels about artists' and writers' formations. This split can be read, on one hand, as similar to that between Rosario Castellanos' nameless girl narrator and her parents in *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] or between José María Arguedas' Ernesto and his father. In both of these earlier cases, youth deviated

from paths prescribed by the parents and selected alternatives for themselves that function in dialectic with the traditional social pathways. The major generational difference found between the older and younger generations involves attitudes towards key social changes and their resultant rejection or acceptance. To this end, this generational conflict that shapes Bolaño's novel, like that determining social attitudes in Meirelles and Lund's film *Cidade de Deus*, involves a change in attitudes about life in the context of a social order in which narcotic drugs and a connected elevated violence may be found ubiquitously.

Two key distinctions separate Bolaño's depiction of generational strife from that presented by *Cidade de Deus* [City of God]. First, while drugs and violence may be found ubiquitously in both works, the purpose of the violence and its aesthetics differs greatly. In the film, acts of extreme violence receive highly aesthetic treatment in order to alienate its viewer and, in turn, to awaken a sense of critical, social outrage. To this ends, the violence of *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] enacts an unabashed didacticism that echoes the heavy-handed social aesthetics found in Jorge Amado's early writings, and particularly his *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]. On the other hand, as the very name of the 'movement' announces, the 'visceral' violence present in the experiences (although perhaps not the works) of the 'realismo visceral' [visceral realism] practitioners serves another aim. Here the aesthetics provide a *telos* that the *communitas* attempts to recognize but that, like the violence at the core of *Cidade de Deus*, serves as a constant threat to the group's stability. Given this reading it is not in the least unexpected that the most cogent description of the group's purpose as found in the novel's lengthy second section comes from a group affiliate who resides in a sanatorium.

Concluding Thoughts: Names and the Remaking of Self in the *Communitas*

For the individual who finds an immanent *telos* within the context of the *communitas*, the initial identity ultimately becomes remade within and according to the necessities of the group. The works of literature and film examined within this chapter demonstrate this most clearly in the moments when characters' names change. Name changes and the acquisition or use of distinct names within particular periods of life are not uncommon aspects of both Latin American and Latino/a/x letters and a great deal of research has examined the personal selection of names in order to engage with important, historically-contextualized questions of self-fashioning.³⁶ Names acquired in processes of *communitas* formation generally come from the exterior and thus do not initially involve self-fashioning processes. The individual's eventual or ultimate relationship with the new name, however, may in some ways be read as a self-fashioning under liminal circumstances.

In *Sin nombre* [Nameless], most of the gang members already bear descriptive moniker's that communicate some aspect of their position in the gang or that mark an element of the identity. This procedure emerges, as so many of the initiation processes do, in the context of demonstrating Benito's induction into the gang. One of the film's earliest scenes depicts Benito receiving a brutal beating at the hands of gang members as a leader counts to 13. This same leader notes that even the severe beating does not stop Benito from smiling and, from then on, the Maras refer to him as 'Smiley.'³⁷ This process

³⁶ While many other writers through the 19th century used different names at distinct points of their writing lives, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega comes most immediately to mind. Writing in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, Gómez Suárez de Figueroa eventually settled upon "El Inca Garcilaso de la Vega" after trying other names.

³⁷ The Mara's use of particular words in English bears quick mention here. This may subtly acknowledge the group's provenance in the United States.

demonstrates how such renaming could occur and how experience may have led to the other gang members' descriptive names.

Just like *Sin nombre* [Nameless], the majority of the youths depicted in *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] bear typically descriptive nicknames attendant to their participation in the *communitas* of the gangs as represented. The film's narrator Buscapé [Rocket], for example, possesses a name translates to rocket and that refers to a specific kind of firework found in southeastern Brazil. In fact, it is only Zé Pequeno [Lil Ze] who undergoes a name change. Introduced initially as Dadinho, a word that translates to small dice, the film fails to present any specific reason for this initially descriptive name. one reading of the name's symbolism clearly invokes the idea of chance, happenstance, or fate with which dice are so often associated. Zé Pequeno's name change takes place at a pivotal moment in the film's story. In the third chapter, "A historia do apartamento" [The Story of the Apartment], Buscapé narrates the changing state of the drug trafficking in the favela by focusing on the space of one apartment owned originally by a widow who supported her children by selling small amounts of marijuana. With the change in drug preference and the arrival of heavy arms and violence the apartment maintained its centrality even as it passed from one drug trafficker to another. Zé Pequeno's name change takes place in the midst of this chaos in a poorly described Umbanda ceremony that promises to give him power and that he will "fica crescendo" ["keep growing"] beyond his name and into the power he single-mindedly pursues. This name change, which he moments later shouts at his old acquaintances who had yet to learn of the new name, marks his emergence as the charismatic leader who dominates the local drug marker.

Unlike Zé Pequeno, El Casper and Sayra both also give up aspects of their identity as the film progresses in exchange for the chance at survival in the context of their individual journeys. The title in fact could be read referring to the shifting identities El Casper acquires: he is Willy with Marta Marlen, El Casper with the Maras, and uses no name once on board the train. At the same time, this namelessness introduced as a key to the film by its very title could also refer to the stripping of Sayra's identity. Although she spends part of the film with her newly reunited family, ultimately Sayra ends up alone and anonymous in an enormous empty parking lot buttressed by large commercial stores, Walmart, Costco, and so forth, that probably also represent the final destination of the train cargo that traveled, safely and without interruption, inside the trains. This focus on names and on the erasure of the film's protagonists' identities resituates the film's purpose: it is at once a film about the initiation of a new Mara Salvatrucha gang member, Benito/Smiley, and the steady movement of the commercial goods from Mexico to the United States. Read as such, this journey and the identities it erases along with the lives that end all testify to a particular history which requires such sacrifices.

The subtle social criticism extant in *Sin nombre* [Nameless] finds an explicit explanation in Junot Diaz's *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. As mentioned previously his novel tells the story of a family already shattered by its history and in particular its collision, unfortunate or ill-fated, with the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republics. Diaz explains the idea of an underlying curse as he frames his text in an introductory section voiced by his narrator, Yunior. It is this narrator who introduces the idea of the *fukú*, a spirit that "they say... came first from Africa carried in the screams of the enslaved" (Diaz 1). This spirit permeates the chapter's highly stylistic description of

the European “Discovery” of the Dominican Republic and also the intimate family tales that make up the novel’s focus. In this way, the novel is both about events occurring on the grandest of scales – the actions of global superpowers – and those on the smallest – the discovery of a cancerous tumor in Oscar’s mother’s breast. The organization of the tales consciously problematizes any sense of complete understanding of either the characters. Yet this problematized reading is not done for solely aesthetic purpose but rather in service to the text’s larger purpose of highlighting sometimes jarring rifts extant within the small family.

The importance of the novel’s mystical elements has been analyzed at length by literary critics. The main vestiges of the mysticism include the *fukú*, a man without a face who appears just prior to the novel’s most violent events, the *zafa*, and the mongoose. Of these elements, the novel spends the most time elaborating on the *fukú* which thus emerges as both an antagonistic spirit and a curse. The difference between these two things is one of will or agency. A curse seems more passive while the *fukú* follows as a malevolent spirit. By calling it a *fukú americanus* the narrator nods subtly to the positivistic drive for Latin definitions of items detailed in many 18th and 19th century chroniclers’ attempts to dominate the Americas through a systemic process of linguistic and categorical cataloging. Because the faceless man appears at the moments of greatest violence and in close relation to major characters’ potential deaths I think that it connects with the *Fukú*, so it can be read as the embodiment of the curse. In contrast to the *fukú*, the *zafa* is really vaguely described but seems to concern active steps one could take to ward off the *fukú*. The mongoose then appears as a sort of protector figure. It’s unclear if the mongoose sings but it does seem to appear (also in the final moments but in a more

positive way) with music. – Belicia hears the music in the cane fields and notes that the accent sounds Colombian or maybe Venezuelan and the cab driver who also barely escapes with his life hears it too. This spirit then imbibes the narratives created in its wake, and can be found in the same devastation at the heart of *Sin nombre* [Nameless].

Like *Sin nombre* [Nameless], *Oscar Wao* also examines the subsuming of lives into macronarratives that will ultimately consume and destroy them. As various critics have argued, this narrative includes a large number of conspicuous discontinuities and silences that contribute to its historicization project.³⁸ For example, the Cabral family that is central to the narrative, comprised of Belicia (Beli) Cabral and her two children, Oscar and Lola, originates in a family almost completely eviscerated under Trujillo's regime. Beli's own birth came after her father was already imprisoned, her extremely dark complexion unlike that of her older sisters and curiously similar to that of a neighbor, casting a slight shadow on her biological connection to the family. Additionally, two of Beli's sisters' names appear completely lost to history as do the "lost" years before Beli is rescued by "La Inca", her father's distant cousin whose name is never explained. In contrast to these names, Beli gives her U.S.-born children curious names that at once make present her own difficult relationship to her history and past while simultaneously denying her children the details of her early life, details that could have perhaps assisted to save Oscar. Lola's full name is mentioned only once. Lola's real name is Dolores, a common enough name but one that carries at its root the word 'dolor' or pain.

Acknowledging this also potentially reveals Oscar's name as containing the word 'scar'.

³⁸ See Hanna, Monica. "'Reassembling the fragments': Battling historiographies, Caribbean discourse, and nerd genres in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*", *Callaloo*, 33.2. Spring 2010, 498-520 and Espericueta, J. "Fukú y el legado poscolonial de occidente en *La maravillosa vida breve de Óscar Wao*." *Estudios* 116, vol. Xiv, spring 2016.

Thus, the children who are at once Belicia's joy and a large part of her reason for her surviving the initial attack but also her extremely hard work that keeps the family financially afloat in both the United States and the Dominican Republic.

Oscar's "nickname" comes as a result of a moment in which he almost finds himself part of the *communitas* that is late adolescent social life in Patterson, New Jersey. In these scenes, Oscar has finally found a potential romantic interest but whose current relationship status remains a significant obstacle as she has a boyfriend. Nonetheless, in these few scenes Oscar finds a confidence that permits him to consider joining the ongoing social life that exists around him. He connects both individually and to small groups, such as a group of "nerdy" young men who play board games at the university.³⁹ Ultimately, Oscar acquires his nickname "Oscar Wao" as a play on the name of the author Oscar Wilde, thus connecting him at once to a world of literary elites that he never will quite be able to reach as his own literary work produced about the *fukú* and the family's history in the Dominican Republic gets lost in the mail. In the adoption of this nickname which the novel uses as part of its title, Oscar has finally found himself in a *communitas* formed of the lonely and in the "base" genres of science fiction and fantasy. Like Turner's analysis of the Jesuit monks, in accepting a position among the lowest of the low and his permanence there, Oscar begins to find a *communitas*.

³⁹ Various critics including Monica Hanna have examined how Oscar's nerdiness, marked by his enjoyment of comics, science fiction, and fantasy, function to alienate Oscar from mainstream youth culture. Particularly at the point in U.S. history, comics especially had been "marginalized" as a lesser artistic form. Hanna shows how in Junot Diaz's novel, "the comic genre becomes interwoven with a line of critical thought that Yunion traces, which includes such important Caribbean writers and scholars as Derek Walcott, Edouard Glissant, Fernando Ortiz, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and Aime Cesaire" (Hana 513). Diaz himself discussed a similarity between the elaborate new codes needed to locate oneself in the context of the fantasy or science fiction.

Oscar's nickname communicates the titular character's status as a figure in his community that can never quite be assimilated on his own terms nor capable of fully meeting the requirements of either his peers or his family. The eventual impossibility of either *communitas* comes not because individuals are unwilling to share or to shed their identity but because the stakes of connections require such high levels of sacrifice in terms of personal emotional vulnerability and the strength of caring. Accordingly, the ultimate code that permits continuity without community involves the silencing of pain caused *in* the same origin of the Dominican diaspora. Yuniors, the novel's not completely reliable narrator, at once violates this pact of silence by writing down the story but simultaneously hiding it in freezers in his basement. He does so while commenting that he intends to share the story with Lola's daughter when she comes in search of answers, a quest that Oscar attempted in the previous generation only to lose his manuscript in the bureaucratic ether of the international mail system.

Names occupy a crucial point in the consideration of the relationship of the individual to the *communitas*. The giving up or taking on of names marks processes of liminality and acceptance. Moreover, in the *extrication* of the self from the permanent *communitas* the resituation of the name or resetting of the individual identity can thus be traced with a focus on the importance of acts of name and naming.

In the context of *The Brief, Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Oscar's two names speak of the dual impossibilities. The first failed entity involves Oscar's family. The family, although living, cannot connect with itself and even in the few moments that bring all the family members together in the same space these characters fail repeatedly to become a cohesive unit. Even facing the obvious decline of Oscar, neither the

individual family members nor the unit as a whole can do anything. Hope occasionally presents itself in the form of external communities proffered Oscar in the appearance of occasional friends or the ever illusive social *communitas* of other young men like himself. This too fails, a fact that Yuniór seems to believe stems from his own failure to put friendship and Oscar or even Lola over his constant womanizing and the slating of his own needs.

What Yuniór fails to recognize is the sheer impossibility of any form of *communitas* emerging from this situation. The clues to this failure may be found already in the opening scenes describing Oscar in which older relatives push him to act as a Dominican adult male, actions they take to include suggestive dancing with other young (elementary school aged children) and, slightly later, to hit a Middle School girlfriend who hesitates to reciprocate Oscar's feelings. This narrative creates a situation of aggressive relations that cannot abide as an enduring code for a cohesive social life, at least for Oscar and at least in terms of either friends or girlfriends. Even as these characters give up parts of their identities – Lola's hair, Oscar's name – they do so without being able to create a cohesive social bond, either as a family or as any form of *communitas*. The denial of this and the collapse or denial of both transcendent and immanent *telos* leaves Oscar adrift, a fact accounted for by the Fukú and more explicitly the broad social conditions that feed it, permitting the curse to survive and to work its corruption ever onward through new generations.

Chapter Five/Concluding Interlude

Courtesy, the Corrosive Virtue:

Cesar Aira's *Como me hice monja* [How I became a Nun]

and the Decay of Young Bodies

“La simplicidad de mi vida... era equivalente a la nada” (Aira *Cómo* 72)

“My life was so simple it hardly existed” (Aira *How* 76).

Like nearly all the works that I have considered in my project, César Aira's 1993 novel *Cómo me hice monja* [How I Became a Nun] narrates its tale from the completed past, using the Spanish preterit and imperfect tenses, so that the character narrating events does so in a time apart from the events of the novel. Unlike the other works, however, this novel uses the temporal disparity between narrator and events to call attention to two specific narrative elements. First, this dynamic emphasizes the entire story's liminality as it is poised between the tale's hazy beginning as marked by the narrator's “recuerdo vívido” [“vivid memory”] of a crucial event that only comes to conclusion in the novel's final page in the moment when the narrating character “tomé los hábitos” [“took the veil”] (Aira *Cómo* 7; Aira *How* 1). By commencing the novel with a moment (or “rite”) of exclusion that separates the narrator from one of its parents and ending it with a ritual of inclusion expressed through the metaphor of “taking the veil” or entering a convent, the novel thus acts as its own liminal rite in the elaboration of everything that comes between. Second, therefore is the way the novel represents this everything as the

beginning and end but the character's own experience of the time represented by the novel. In Aira's novel, the tale accounts for mere months in the life of a six-year-old who cannot remember life before coming to their current neighborhood and who cannot establish themselves as part of a future time as the character is killed on the novel's final page.¹

Aira's novel and its first pages prepare the reader to engage with a traditional "Rite of Passage" yet the character does not become a nun nor does the novel make much mention of any religion let alone one of such deep dedication. Nonetheless, this novel is still one of rites and one of ultimate liminality beyond even the reach of the communal. The "rituals" the novel involves include a first trip for ice cream, parental protection, learning to read, playing school.... This novel in fact highlights ritual as a remaining performance even when identity itself and the most fundamental of relations have shifted. In considering Aira's writings, we see the themes covered by this dissertation taken beyond traditional narrative limitations and destabilized even more profoundly. First, Aira's text further complicates all of the possible textually inscribed relationships we have already considered: in Aira's text fiction and audience work at odds with each other just as the internal relationships - between child and parent, student and teacher - emerge as constantly and irreducibly ambivalent. The text plays with the reader's efforts to identify the character by providing conflicting information about the narrating character but also regarding the circumstances of the plot. Finally, as we will see throughout this concluding analysis, it is only the revelation of "César's" death that functionally

¹ This is distinct from the totality of the *Bildungsroman* which often and problematically attempted to present a totality from the moment of a character's birth and ending in a vaguely elaborated older middle age.

stabilizes the novel's narration as it permits particularly destabilizing elements to resolve in the moment of their dissolution. In the following pages, I will show how César Aira's *Como me hice monja* [How I became a Nun] expands our consideration of rites of passage by focusing on death, the final passage, expands upon our consideration of social matrices, the young narrator, and, finally, the values and virtues championed by social matrices often to the detriment of the individual.

Aira's novel concludes with its main character's death and, through this revelation, manages to stabilize the narrative imbalances present in the text from its beginning. The text opens with the narrator's statement that "Mi historia, la historia de 'cómo me hice mona', comenzó muy temprano en mi vida.... Antes de eso no hay nada; después, todo siguió hacienda un solo recuerdo vívido, continuo e ininterrumpido, incluidos los lapsos de sueño" (Aira *Cómo* 7) ["My story, the story of 'how I became a nun,' began very early in my life.... Before there is nothing, and after, everything is an extension of the same vivid memory, continuous and unbroken, including intervals of sleep" (Aira *How* 21)]. In this paragraph, the narrator explains the continuity between the beginning event and the narrator's death. Shortly after the family's move from rural Argentina to central Buenos Aires, the narrating character's father takes them for ice cream, a new outing that the character anticipates as its father "me lo había descripto, muy correctamente, como algo inimaginable para el no iniciado, y eso había bastado para que el helado echara raíces en mi mente infantil y creciera en ella hasta tomar las dimensiones de un mito" (Aira *Cómo* 7-8) ["had described it to me as something the uninitiated could not imagine, and that was all it took to plant 'ice cream' in my childish mind, where it grew, taking on mythic proportions" (Aira *How* 21)]. The narration thus

opens on the intimate and common if not wholly universal ritual of a father taking their child for a first ice cream cone. The narrator immediately gags and, after a few attempts, refuses to finish consuming the treat, at once raising the father's ire at the child's "rebellion," before he tastes the cone himself at which time he comes to understand immediately that ice cream is rancid. This incident, which began by positing father against offspring much like Cristina Peri Rossi's story "Ulva Lactua", ultimately leads to the father fighting the ice cream vendor and accidentally killing him.²

The incident with the ice cream vendor begins a "rite of passage" for the narrator that leads to its ultimate end when the vendor's wife kidnaps and kills the narrator. At the same time, it is not the father's murder of the vendor but actually the father's reaction to the child's disgust that receives more narrative attention and that commences a series of separations that distance the narrator from its family but also, as we shall see, from itself. More simply, the plot follows a series of separations that result from this incident: the narrator is separated from its father in the park-turned-crime-scene; the mother only reunites with her child in the hospital; the father is sent to jail; and the child ultimately creates games that permit them more and more physical space between them and their remaining parent which ultimately permits the vendor's widow a moment to abduct them.

² The narrator describes this event using similarly strong rhetoric as that of the narrated toddler's thoughts in Peri Rossi's "Ulva Lactua":

Yo, estremecida, trémula, húmeda, con el vaso de helado en una mano y la cucharita en la otra, la cara roja y descompuesta en un rictus de angustia, no estaba menos inmovilizada. Lo estaba más, atada a un dolor que me superaba con creces, dando con mi infancia, con mi pequeñez, con mi extrema vulnerabilidad, la medida del universe. Papá no insitió más. Mi último y definitivo recurso habría sido terminar por mi cuenta el helado, encontrarle el gusto al fin, remontar la situación. Pero era imposible (Aira *Cómo* 15)

Shaken, trembling, tear-sodden, holding the ice cream cone in one hand and the spoon in the other, my red face twisted in an anxious wince, I was paralyzed too. More so in fact, since I was fastened to a pain that towered over my childhood, my smallness, and my extreme vulnerability, indicating the scale of the universe. Dad had given up. My one last, desperate hope of turning the situation around would have been to get accustomed to the taste and finish the ice cream of my own free will. But it was impossible (Aira *How* 11).

Each of these instances permits the exploration of a particular sort of social separation. However already in the first separation, the moment in which the father forces his child to consume the ice cream prior to tasting it himself, we see a ritual of initiation that based on the parent's own ideas, tastes and understandings but as resonant within the life and perspective of the child. Structurally, this initiation follows the first chapter of *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] in that, prior to the moments discussed in the text, the parent prepared the child for engagement with a new space and activity to the effect, in both novels, the child's actual experience cannot be had without the context of the parents' ideas and beliefs.

While the several social separations discussed in the paragraph above retain crucial importance to the plot, they are viewed askance and thus emerge as somewhat minimalized, as they come from the perspective of an unsteady narrative voice, the cause of which is only revealed in the disclosure of its death on the novel's final page. Initially, the cause of this narrative imbalance appears to be located in the illness the narrator suffers following its consumption of the ice cream:

El mal manifestó en una especie de equivalencia cruel. Mientras mi cuerpo se retorció en las torturas del dolor, mi alma estaba en otra parte, donde por motivos distintos sufría lo mismo. Mi alma... la fiebre... En aquel entonces no se usaba bajar la fiebre con medicamentos... La dejaban cumplir su ciclo, interminablemente... Yo estaba en un delirio constante, me sobraba tiempo para elaborar las historias más barrocas... Supongo que tendría altos y bajos, pero se sucedían en una intensidad única de invención... Las historias se fundían en una sola, que era el revés de una

historia... porque no tenía más historia que mi angustia, y las fantasmagorías no se posaban, no se organizaban... No me permitían siquiera entrar, perderme en ellas... (Aira *Cómo* 24)

The affliction manifested itself as a kind of cruel equivalence. While my body writhed in physical pain, elsewhere, for different reasons, my soul was subjected to an equivalent torture. My soul... the fever.... In those days it wasn't standard practice to control fever with medication... they let it run its course, interminably.... I was in a state of unremitting delirium with plenty of time to concoct the most baroque stories... I had my ups and downs, I suppose, but the stories followed one another in a sustained rush of invention... They fused into one, which was the reverse of a story... because my anxiety was the only story I had, and the fantasies didn't settle or hang together... So I couldn't even enter them and lose myself... (Aira *How* 22-23).]

As this lengthy passage reveals, the child, who only a few pages before admits to forgetting the only home they knew prior to the family's very recent move, now elaborates upon a division experienced between body and soul. This distinction is both timely, at this age the child narrator in a Catholic country would almost certainly be preparing for first communion as we saw in Chapter Two and in *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians] and fraught as the "discovery" comes not because of the Church's or the family's pedagogical intervention but in the young narrator's wandering mind as

resulting from an illness that, like Idolina's, eventually evolves to become undiagnosable for the doctors.³

Aira's novel never seeks to stabilize itself through the steadying of the many interstitial and liminal spaces it creates. To this end, the sex of the narrator is consistently problematized by the text which refuses to operate from a male, female, or intersex locus of enunciation. Instead, Aira's narrating character plays with and against the reader and its own social matrix. The biological sex and gender of the narrating character provides but one of several disorienting factors as the character talks about itself as both a boy and a girl, claiming a traditionally male name and using the boy's bathroom while also uttering comments such as "yo era una niña difícil... una niña problema en algún sentido" (Aira *Cómo* 29) ["I was a difficult girl, a problem child in a sense" (Aira *How* 28)] and describing itself as playing teacher ("característico de una niña de mi edad"

³ Aira's narrator elaborates upon this corporal resistance

Yo no colaboraba con la ciencia. Por una manía, un capricho, una locura, que ni yo misma he podido explicarme, sabotaba el trabajo del médico, lo engañaba. Me hacía la estúpida... Debo de haber pensado que la ocasión era tan propicia que habría sido una pena desaprovecharla. Podía ser todo lo estúpida que quisiera, impunemente. Pero no era tan simple como la resistencia pasiva. La mera negativa era demasiado aleatoria, porque a veces la nada puede ser la respuesta acertada, y yo jamás habría dejado mi suerte en manos del azar. De modo que pudiendo dejar sus preguntas sin respuesta, me tomaba el trabajo de responderlas. Mentía. Decía lo contrario de la verdad, o de lo que me parecía más verdadero (Aira *Cómo* 32-33).

[I was not cooperating with science. An urge, a whim or a manic obsession that not even I could explain impelled me to sabotage the doctor's work, to trick him. I pretended to be stupid... I must have thought the opportunity was too good to waste. I could be as stupid as I liked, with impunity. But it wasn't simply a matter of passive resistance. Doing nothing at all was too haphazard, because sometimes nothing can be the right response, and I was determined not to let chance determine my fate. So even though I could have left his questions unanswered, I took the trouble to answer them. I lied. I said the opposite of the truth, or the opposite of what seemed truest to me. (Aira *How* 32-33). This passage is central to the text as it permits the emergence of the young narrating to occur within the context of their hospital stay and also in the creative assertion of self through a lie. While this lie is not necessarily the first – *Balún Canán's* [The Nine Guardians'] narrating girl also omits the truth at the end of her tale while Idolina's lameness also potentially represents a false status of sorts – it represents the first clear case in which a lie has been admitted, but to the reader and not to the textually constrained social matrix.

(Aira *Cómo* 76) [“something typical of a girl my age” (Aira *How* 82)].⁴ The effect of this interplay generally tends to emphasize an external impression of a male child in that the narrator’s social matrix, its parents and teachers and peers relate to it as male, call it by male names and use male pronouns for the narrator while the same first person perspective tends to call itself a female, use feminine pronouns, and discuss “typical” girl things. Nonetheless, the text often doubles back on itself in moments such as when the narrator talks of itself as a son (“hijo”) and thus it vacillates without staking out a claim of sex.

Physical spaces and personal encounters provide other moments in which the text complicates the reader’s attempts to orient themselves in relation to the novel. The novel’s narrator moves even further afield to disorient the reader by presenting a series of out-of-body experiences alongside or even within moments of bottomless interiority. For example, when the narrator’s mother takes them to visit their father in prison, the narration jumps from following the narrator’s musings on the father’s situation to finding itself stuck between the prison walls the next day. Thus, even as we the readers follow the narration with precision and know a crucial moment has been denied us and is lost to the narrator’s consciousness as well, in the lacking of a physical body and the delinking of this fictional consciousness from a narrated body, the final disconnect emerges in a prison, of all places, the exact place where observation itself assumes a higher level of panoptical precision.

As a result of the novel’s expansion of liminal moments and interstitial spaces, the novel’s narrator emerges from within Aira’s text as a roving, rolling eye while the

⁴ Given the narrating character’s use of pronouns and adjectives attributed to both sexes, I have thus far avoided using gendered pronouns and will continue to refer to this character using ‘them’ and ‘their.’

character's lies and creative elaboration of the truth continually functions in the frustration of barriers and clarity. This perspective at once distinguishes itself as capable of detecting and presenting identifiable figures only to immediately blur these entities to the point of their dissolution. The brightness of the prose, its lucid, sensorial descriptions of the ice cream, the park, and even the narrator's interiority, contrasts markedly with the dimness of Castellanos' novels. Aira's work thus represents a sort of progression: while Castellanos' characters "work in the darkness,"⁵ repeating the performance of rituals even as they brought them no assistance, aid, or relief, Aira's bright prose pushes these performances beyond the breaking point and, in the process, dissolves the characters so that all that remains besides a few fragments of bodies and relationships are the very virtues that promised to hold families, communities, and societies together. The narrating character's lies represent part of the expansion but its death on the final pages of the novel serves to contextualize the breakdown as well.

The final two chapters of Aira's novel deal explicitly with the corrosion of the social matrix and the role of virtue in the narrator's death. Aira's narrator sets up the novel's conclusion in the first lines of the book's penultimate chapter when the narrator comments that "mi mamá era mi major amiga" but also noting that this relationship resulted naturally from their shared isolation so that "en esos casos la necesidad se hace virtud, y no es menos virtud por eso... ni menos necesidad" (Aira *Cómo* 83) ["In such cases we make a virtue of necessity, which doesn't mean it's any less virtuous. Or any

⁵ In Castellanos' prose – her own office of dimness – bodies and geographical locations still operate within a haze as they relate to each other and fulfill roles even if the bottom has fallen out of society and they acknowledge that all that remains is the performance. As a reminder, Castellanos' *Oficio de tenebras* [Book of Lamentations'] title recalls the Catholic rite of Matins, celebrated at the last or first light, and thus suggests a kind of barely discernible haze. This idea of "working in the darkness" I borrow with permission from Sara Castro-Kláren.

less necessary (Aira *How* 92)]. In explicitly mentioning this “virtue”, the narrator begins to present for the reader’s consideration an examination of the values espoused generally within the social matrix that permit its continuity. As we saw in Chapter Three’s consideration of Zoraida’s morality, the values of a social matrix permit the diffuse praxes of power that functions to powerfully bind all of a matrix’s agent to each other. However, because such values as “humildad”, in Zoraida’s case, or for Aira’s narrator the even vaguer idea of “cortesía” [courtesy], require sacrifice and the acceptance of hierarchical power structures, the performance of acts in line with these virtues are not necessarily in themselves virtuous.

While necessity contextualized the relationship Aira’s narrator comes to share with their mother, by the end of the novel even this conceit disintegrates. The narrator follows a strange woman, ultimately revealed to be the ice cream vendor’s widow, to their death due to the mandates of “cortesía” [courtesy]. Even as the narrator gives many rational reasons that would permit them to avoid the conclusion – a spate of recent child murders in the area, an intuition of disaster thus far proved correct – the narrator refuses to make any choice that could be considered rude and therefore puts into practice the extremely limited agency that is permitted them by their social matrix and further supported by family, Church, and State.⁶ This virtue of cortesía thus leads directly to the narrators death and explains the disintegration of the entire narrative as well as the society therein included.

Death itself permits and even requires a reevaluation of the narrative *Cómo me hice monja* [How I Became a Nun]. On the one hand, the narrator’s death permits the

⁶ Although these latter two entities are almost entirely absent from explicit mention in this novel, their subtle presence is felt throughout from the novel’s very title to the appearance of the state-run prison.

book's destabilizing elements – the fragmented memory, the undefined sex, and the various lapses of space and time – to be understood as nonessential as death breaks down the importance of these considerations. At the same time, because the novel includes in the preterit tense the moment in which the narrator's brain fails,⁷ the reader is left with our ever-important question: Who speaks and from when? The answer for this question already revealed itself in the narrator's first brush with death: in realizing the separation of body from soul the latter split off and it is from that space that this novel finds its locus of enunciation. Aira's narrator "took the veil" in realizing their own death so that all that remains is the soul, which the fragmentation of the novel suggests to be as an entity beyond gender, history, space, and time.

Aira's novel permits a reconsideration, as well, of the distinct projects extant within the Latin American liminal fictions, Latino/a/x fictions of liminality, and the western *Bildungsroman*. On the one hand this claim certainly locates itself to specific national, regional, and diasporic contexts. For example, in Aira, Castellanos, Vargas Llosa, Arguedas and the other works considered, these fictions activate a "horizon of expectations" located to historical moments and circumstances. In Aira, the contrasting of specific individual fictional events – the life and death of the novel's narrator - as part of a historical fabric. As a result, the novel establishes itself as participating in a relationship to actual Argentinian history as it locates the events to a moment when contaminated milk led to many illnesses and deaths.⁸ By taking this moment and, at least initially,

⁷ "El cerebro, mi órgano más leal, persistió un instante más, apenas lo necesario para pensar que lo que me estaba pasando era la muerte, la muerte real..." (Aira *Cómo* 106) ["my brain, most loyal of my organs, kept working for a moment longer, just long enough for me to think that what was happening to me was death, real death" (Aira *How* 117)].

⁸ In describing the sickness, Aira's narrator notes an expansion of the disease beyond Argentina to its neighboring countries. In disease, as we have already seen in the "rebrote" [pandemic outbreak] that

fictionalizing it, the novel connects itself to an actual historical incident with a national location. Aira's novel then demands to be read as an Argentinian novel even if other markers of internal ambiguity continue to destabilize orientation relative to traditional markers of identity.⁹ At the same time, and to return to the question of the narrator's lies and creative fabrication, this text also permits an evaluation of the "possibility of the 'truth'" as part of the constant mediating that occurs within the context of distinct matrices and in the unending processes through which the self relates to both itself and to others.¹⁰

Ultimately, Aira's novel invites a profound reflection of the ethic of courtesy in opposition to the search for and possible statement of "truth." Courtesy suggests itself in

concludes Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], there thus represents a potential coming together beyond established boundaries.

Yo había sido víctima de los temibles ciánidos alimenticios... la gran marea de intoxicaciones letales que aquel año barría la Argentina y países vecinos... El aire estaba cargado de miedo, porque atacaban cuando menos se los esperaba, el mal podía venir en cualquier alimento, aun los más naturales... la papa, el zapallo, la carne, el arroz, la naranja... A mí me tocó el helado. Pero hasta la comida hecha en casa, amorosamente... podía ser veneno... Los niños eran los más afectados... no resistían... Las amas de casa se desesperaban. ¡La madre mataba a su bebé con la papilla! Era una lotería ... Tantas teorías contradictorias... Tantos habían muerto... Los cementerios se llenaban de pequeñas lápidas con inscripciones cariñosas... El ángel voló a los brazos del Señor... firmado: sus padres inconsolables. Yo la saqué barata. Sobreviví..." (Aira *Cómo* 23-24).

["I was a victim of the terrible cyanide contamination ... the great wave of lethal food poisoning that was sweeping Argentina and the neighboring countries that year ... The air was thick with fear, because it struck when least expected; any foodstuff could be contaminated, even the most natural ... potatoes, pumpkin, meat, rice, oranges ... In my case it was ice cream. But even food lovingly prepared at home could be poisoned ... Children were the most vulnerable ... they had no resistance. Housewives were at their wit's end. A mother could kill her baby with baby food. It was a lottery ... So many conflicting theories ... So many deaths ... The cemeteries were filling up with little tombstones, tenderly inscribed ... Our angel has flown to the arms of the Lord ... signed: his inconsolable parents. I got off lightly. I survived (Aira *How* 21-22)."]

⁹ Aira's discursive practice contrasts, for example, with texts such as J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* which similarly frustrates attempts of geographical location in the effort to tell a "universalized" story. By locating events clearly to an Argentinian matrix, Aira's text, like those we have read throughout this dissertation, selects a more specific 'horizon of expectations' against which this text can be read.

¹⁰ In the final sentences of this paragraph and the one that follows immediately below, I cite and acknowledge with gratitude conversations and remarks passed to me here by Sara Castro-Klären in our discussions of Aira's works.

many of these fictions as a value that permits the stabilized persistence of the social matrix. At the same time, courtesy may, at times, require a lie by emission or omission as we have seen in both *Cómo me hice monja* [How I Became a Nun] and Rosario Castellanos' novels. Thus, while other texts – including Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* – present characters who assume that truth will potentially offer a sort of redemption, Aira's brief but provocative narrative destroys such a search through both the death of its narrator and the revelation of that character's many lies.

Conclusion

Towards the Liminal Horizon

Canonical works of Latin American and Latino/a/x fiction and film often employ young central characters that permit their writers to reflect upon important social issues including education, violence, drugs, masculinity, and community. At the same time, the prevalent theoretical model used to engage and to study critically these novels and their young protagonists is the *Bildungsroman*, or the “novela de la formación” [novel of formation]. The employment of this distinctly western model most often results in either a reading of Latin American and Latino/a/x novels of youth as “failed” *Bildungsroman* as their characters often cannot fully participate in the formative processes required by the European genre or in the creation and employment of reading strategies that permit such “failures” to be read as part of a discussion regarding regional difference. Both sets of results ultimately reinforce the centrality of the *Bildungsroman* that, in turn, furthers an idea of western cultural dominance. Moreover, the propagation of the *Bildungsroman* model at best minimizes and at worst wholly erases important and sometimes revolutionary aesthetic projects found across Hispanic literature and film.

In order to address this problematic over application and misuse of the *Bildungsroman* model, my project examined works of fiction and film that deploy young protagonists whose youth permits them a unique perspective relative to the development of their respective plots and societies. I focused principally on young central characters,

in particular Idolina and Marcela from Rosario Castellanos' 1962 novel *Oficio de tinieblas* [The Book of Lamentations]; the unnamed Argüellos daughter from Castellanos' 1957 novel, *Balín Canán* [The Nine Guardians]; Ernesto from José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], published in 1958; Cuéllar and his cohort from Mario Vargas Llosa's 1967 novella "Los cachorros" [The Cubs]; Pedro Bala and the other "captains" from Jorge Amado's 1937 novel *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands]; the various children presented in Cristina Peri Rossi's *La rebelión de los niños*, published in 1980; Oscar Wao and his sister Lola from Junot Díaz's 2007 novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*; Juan García Madero from Roberto Bolaño's 1998 novel, *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives]; Willy/"El Casper" and Sayra from Cary Fukunaga's 2009 film *Sin nombre* [Nameless]; Buscapé (Rocket), Ze Pequeno (Lil Ze), and the other youths from the favela in Fernand Meirelles and Kátia Lund's 2002 film *Cidade de Deus* [City of God]; and the narrator of César Aira's 1993 novel *Cómo me hice monja* [How I Became a Nun].

My close reading of these novels, short stories, and films permitted me to see that in each of these distinct texts, young characters possess and speak from a liminal perspective demarcated by communal praxes relating to age. I also came to see that writers and filmmakers use these characters not to instruct or to guide readers towards any sense of complete adulthood, the traditional objective of the *Bildungsroman*, but rather that artists use young people in their respective artistic modes to critique the social scenarios that provide these characters few alternatives or to explore the expanding and increasingly-expansive liminal spaces created in response to this dearth of alternatives. In approaching questions of liminality and, originally, adolescence, I sought out theories of

liminality in the writings of the cultural anthropologists, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, along with the more recent philosophies of Tristan Garcia. To this consideration, I added a consideration of agency based on readings from Michel Foucault and pluritopic hermeneutics from Walter Mignolo in order to begin approaching young figures as contextualized agents capable of maintaining a variety of strategies and objectives as they engage with the flux of their respective socio-cultural matrices. Chapter One (“Chapter One Approaching the In Between: Lives, Edges, and Liminality in the Consideration of Youth in Literature”) thus concluded by suggesting a theory of liminal agency as well as a hermeneutic approach that incorporated the pluritopic subject in order to guide an approach to the literary subjects.

The tradition of reading Latin American, Latino/a/x, and diasporic fiction and films as *Bildungsroman* has profoundly limited the critical study of youth in literature. On the one hand, and as I concluded in the third chapter, this approach would suggest an “ideal reader” as one versed principally in western literary traditions rather than a “competent reader” who engages with Latin American and Latino/a/x literature and film in its own context. Therefore, reading these texts apart from the western tradition permits an engagement with their contemporary 20th and 21st century themes as timely and impacted by historical developments but not necessarily excessively bound to either a pre-Colombian or a colonial past. Freed from the weighty requirements of the western tradition as well as the onus of the historical tragedy of the European conquest of the Americas, permitted this study to engage more directly with the texts and their representations of youth as liminal figures and therefore to reach specific conclusions regarding their function and use in literature.

First, as mentioned briefly above, although all of these novels involve characters in the process of aging they do not universally or even similarly deal with a character's totalized formation. My analysis, which relies on the conceptual tools outlined just above, reveals three specific trajectories that deal differently with these ideas of formation and aging. In one set of novels and films, young people experience a great deal of pain and gain a significant amount of empathy while in the liminal state and these works tend to present their characters in the conclusions as turning towards lives bent on social reform. For example, Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] concludes by giving its reader snapshots of the novel's characters as adults. All of these young boys who the reader followed from the beach to the "Reformatório" [Reformatory] are then striving to change the system as journalists, political activists, and priests. This category of texts represents the most explicitly ideological and also the most similar to the *Bildungsroman* in that the characters do seem to emerge from the liminal space as formed characters. Yet because these characters are bent not on the replication and repetition of problematic systems but on changing or completely undoing them and such works cannot be read as *Bildungsroman* but rather represent a distinct group of works. This is more evident in the other two trajectories permitted these youths in these novels and films. The second class comprises those characters who cannot or will not conform to traditional options permitted youth. Mario Vargas Llosa's "Los cachorros" [The Cubs], for example, represents such a work in its presentation of a central character who is left castrated following a horrendous accident. Because this character does not possess the ability to have sexual relations with women, he cannot thus become a biological father and in the erasure of these two standard options the boy and his society cannot create alternative

routes. This novella deals explicitly with a character who cannot develop and for whom conforming remains an impossibility. Finally, this study also reveals a third class of liminal youths who begin to occupy the liminal phase as a form of resistance regarding the lack of viable options. Such resistance may be found, for example, in the film *Cidade de Deus* [City of God] as well as in Junot Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* when young groups or individuals refuse the transcendental *telos* of adulthood while finding or creating alternative ways to reside in a state of permanent liminality. This last class occasionally functions as the *communitas* described to varying extent by Aristotle and Victor Turner. In the case of all three trajectories, the challenges faced by young characters proliferate particularly if the children are abandoned, orphaned, or otherwise isolated by their social situation. Orphans and abandoned children such as the "Captains" from Amado's novel and some of the boys in Ernesto's school in *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] thus must find ways of surviving in a world that chastises or rewards particular behaviors but that will not provide food, shelter, or emotional support. On the other hand, girls such as *Balún Canán*'s [The Nine Guardians'] nameless narrator and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*'s Lola may live with one or more parents and guardians but at the same time, due to their respective society's challenges, find themselves incredibly isolated in the context of their particular social matrix and the values therein inscribed.²³⁸

²³⁸ As I have shown repeatedly over the course of this project, particular institutions create and benefit from the isolation of individuals. Liminal figures, including youth, as represented in film and fiction provide a means of examining how these sorts of sequesterations, segregations, and/or isolations form, function, and perpetuate the diffuse power of institutions. At the same time, such a consideration also emphasizes particular aspects of traditional marginalization as based on a character's gender, race, ethnicity, and/or sexuality. Future research will examine how these specific elements emerge from literature such as Fernando Vallejo's *La virgin de los sicarios* [Our Lady of the Assassins] and films including Lucía Puenzo's 2007 *XXY*.

A second conclusion suggested by my study reveals the insidious collusion of powerful and well-established hierarchical institutions in the definition and elaboration of limits that inscribe youth. Building out of the research and historical analysis that comprises Chapter Two (“Comparative Moments in the “Denaturalized” History of Adolescence”), I examined central institutions directing options for youth involved: the family, the schools, the State, and the Church. This approach revealed in the literature distinct moments when these young people come to understand that institutions including their families, the schools, the Catholic Church, and their respective States do not work on their behalf and, in fact, more frequently possess objectives that require the subjugation and suppression of young people in service to social stability and the continuity of the very processes that inhibit these youths. This dynamic is found to some extent in all of the texts but is beautifully elaborated throughout the first chapter of José María Arguedas’ *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] when Ernesto sees Cuzco for the first time and discovers his place at the nexus of family and social conflicts. In one telling episode Ernesto’s father, upset by his confrontation with “el Viejo” [the Old Man] goes to the Cathedral in Cuzco to pray. Awed not by the ornate building but rather its scope and awesome dominance of the square, Ernesto cannot pray but rather observes “the little trees that had been planted in the plaza” facing the church “seemed intentionally dwarfed in the presence of the Cathedral and the Jesuit Church” (Arguedas *Deep* 9). He comments to his father that the trees “must not have been able to grow... they couldn’t in front of the cathedral” (Arguedas *Deep* 9). The enormity of the Church thus reveals itself as factor limiting the growth of these trees, and metaphorically of Ernesto himself as his later conflicts with Father Linares show.

In Chapter Four (“Forever Young? Immanent Liminalities as Horizons as Escape”), I examined non-transcendent *telos* as resulting in the elaboration of *communitas* groups that perpetuate their own survival through lateral expansion. In this study, I showed how the Mara Salvatrucha gang in Cary Fukunaga’s *Sin nombre* [Nameless], the generations of gangs in *Cidade de Deus* [City of God], and the adherents of “realismo visceral” [visceral realism] in Roberto Bolaño’s *Los detectives salvajes* [The Savage Detectives] all function as *communitas* groups that result from the truncated *telos* expanding not transcendently towards adulthood, maturity, or even in paths of development but rather in its lateral extension as a socially created option. This chapter also showed how pain and vulnerability can function to limit a family’s development as happens in Junot Diaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. The failure of the family to become a *communitas* thus explains the repetition of violence and isolation at each generation and also provides an underlying explanation for the text’s production in that its narrator explains that he saves the text for the deceased Oscar’s niece who he, Yuniór, knows will one day have to search her family’s curtailed history for answers to the same questions Lola, Oscar, Dolores, and perhaps even La Inca sought to address.

Finally, as we can see throughout these works, thresholds multiply across in Latin American and diasporic literature and film. While my focus has been specifically upon young characters, their proximity with and intimate connection to their own socio-cultural matrices often permits these characters to observe adults who acknowledge, to varying degrees, the deep social difficulties extant within their respective societies. These parent, teacher, and guardian characters – who were examined at depth in Chapter Three (“Navigating Matrices: Fictional Youth and the Social Space of Flux”) – are also often

found to be in states of flux. Their experiences, although somewhat peripheral to the young protagonists', demonstrate these adults must also navigate an ever-increasing series of thresholds, borders, and boundaries while also being required to perform the role of parent, teacher, or guardian. Zoraida Argüellos from *Balún Canán* [The Nine Guardians], Ernesto's Father from *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers], and the priest figures in Jorge Amado's *Os capitães da areia* [The Captains of the Sands] all represent these "errante" [errant] figures that wander through their lives as agents of values, praxes, and beliefs to which they do not necessarily wholly ascribe. Consequently, the experiences of these adults already begin to show a breakdown of the transcendent *telos* and a resulting immanent liminality that stretches always beyond the horizon of the present. At the same time, even if liminality always retains some potential for *communitas* formation, this possibility will also always be fought by institutions seeking to curtail any revolutionary possibility that could lead to actual changes including the collusion of new intergenerational *communitas* groups.

As this dissertation has shown, major writers and filmmakers from across Latin America and the Latin American diaspora have used young, liminal characters to reflect upon social praxes and institutions as well as to extend aesthetic praxes relating to narrative, character development, tone, and perspective. Reading these texts outside of the shadow cast by the *Bildungsroman* tradition permits a concerted and thoughtful engagement with these serious texts that, in turn, permits an evaluation of these texts for what they are and what they do rather than beginning in a state of failure or through the utilization of strategies that might do little more than accommodate the dominant, western modes. Additionally, by refocusing a critical approach delinked from western

paradigms the texts are permitted to speak more openly about the contemporary historical and social challenges that they consider and to do so with nuance and distinction. José María Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos* [Deep Rivers] can thus speak not only of disparity and inequality but of the 20th century challenges that lead to a class of “errante” [errant] figures united in facing economic and social challenges resultant, but neither immediately nor directly, from the centuries of colonization and imperial control. Similarly, approached in this manner Rosario Castellanos' works also speak of this phenomenon involving the proliferation of boundaries, barriers, and brinks but as occurring in the mid 20th century rather than in a more distant and hazier past. Simply put, reading Latin American, Latino/a/x, and diasporic texts considering youth and without the *telos* imposed by the *Bildungsroman* permits a contemporary reading of contemporary 20th and 21st century fiction and film.

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Concluding Interlude - Courtesy, the Corrosive Virtue: César Aira's *Cómo me hice monja* [How I became a Nun] and the Decay of Young Bodies

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Vita

Lauren Gabrielle Judy Reynolds was born April 11, 1984 in Cheverly, Maryland. She completed honors B.A.s in Spanish and English at Salem College in 2006. She completed subsequent masters' degrees in International Affairs at George Washington University (GWU) and in Comparative Literature at the University of Colorado at Boulder (CU). While at GW, Lauren worked as an Editor for the Washington Research Group and, later, for the Hewlett Foundation. She began her doctoral studies in 2011 at Johns Hopkins University (JHU) in the Department of German and Romance Languages and Literatures (GRLL). At Hopkins, Lauren received several awards including the Gilman Fellowship, two Program in Latin American Studies (PLAS) travel grants for dissertation research in Peru and Mexico, and the U.S. Department of Education's Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) grant, for language study which she completed in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and subsequently for the completion of dissertation research. Lauren studied Quechua in Cusco, Peru. At Hopkins and CU, Lauren taught and designed various courses including Spanish language, Latin American Culture, Introduction to Literature Written in Spanish, Post-Modernism, and 19th Century Art and Culture. At Hopkins, she received a Dean's Teaching Fellowship in Spring 2016 to teach a course entitled "Children and Adolescents in Latin American Literature and Film" as based on her dissertation research. Lauren served as the co-chair of JHU's Graduate Representative Organization and as Spanish representative to GRLL's Graduate Student Forum, and has served PLAS in a variety of roles. An active participant in her field, Lauren's research focuses on the critical reading of literature produced in the 20th and 21st centuries, with special interest in questions of representation, liminality, and critical theory.